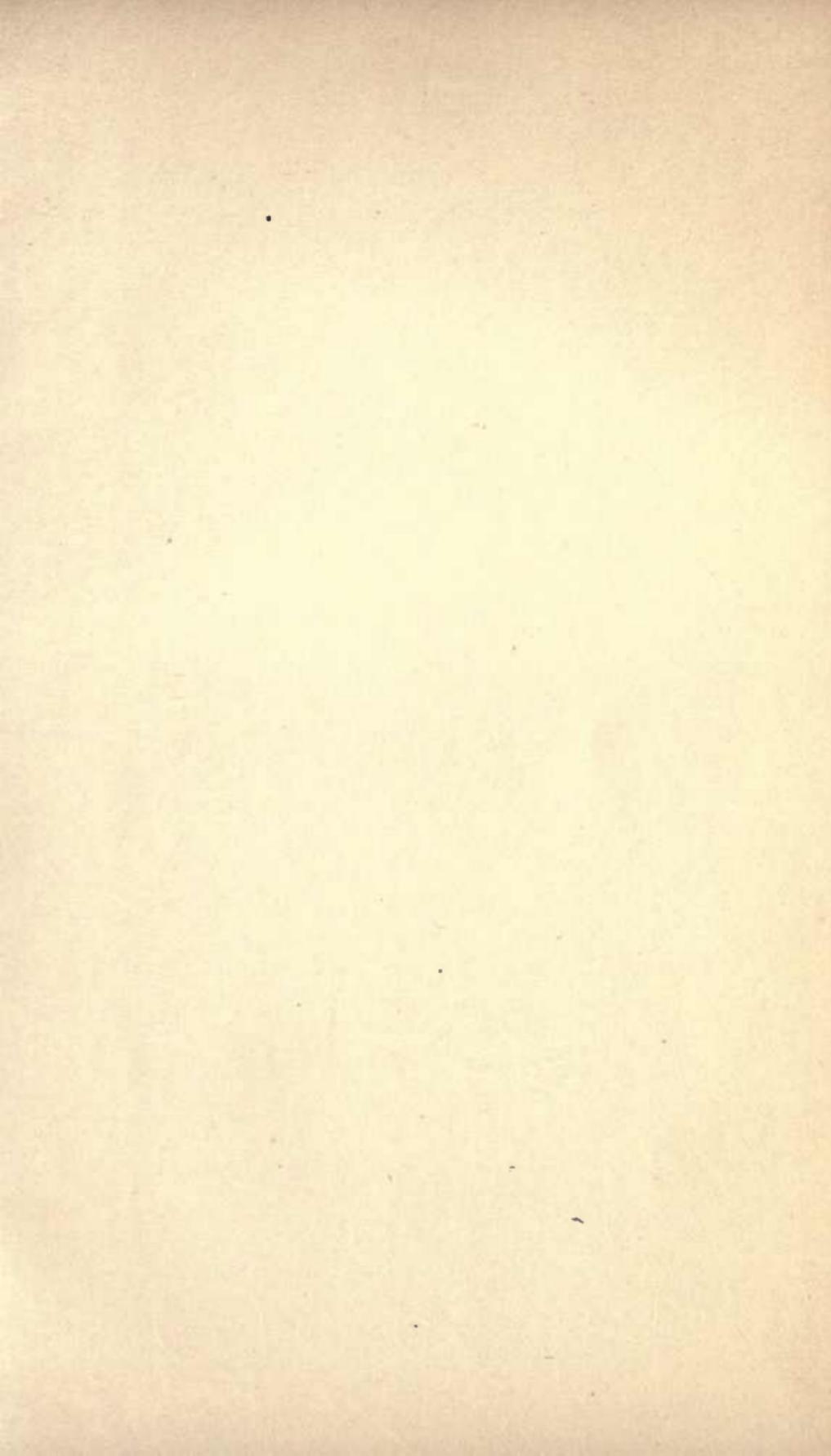




Walton

125







AN INTRODUCTION TO  
PROTESTANT DOGMATICS



# AN INTRODUCTION TO PROTESTANT DOGMATICS

BY

DR. P. LOBSTEIN

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF STRASBURG

Authorized Translation

*FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION*

BY

ARTHUR MAXSON SMITH, PH.D.



PUBLISHED BY THE TRANSLATOR

PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

*Copyright, 1902*  
By ARTHUR MAXSON SMITH

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE justification for the translation of Lobstein's *Introduction à la dogmatique protestante*, presented herewith, is the timeliness of the book in our present condition of theological unrest. It is conceded by eminent scholars who are familiar with the book that it stands quite alone in its orderly, scientific presentation of theological material, while it combines, in a unique manner, the evangelical interests and the scientific effort of the new theology, thus constituting a decisive contribution to the religious world. Further justification for presenting the book to the consideration of theologians and ministers is the fact that it cannot fail to bring these two classes of sincere workers into closer union and sympathy. There is today a very general, lamentable, and, unless corrected, fatal, separation between the Protestant church, represented by the practical pastor, and the Protestant theological seminary, represented by the theological critic and teacher. The reason for this is, I think, perfectly plain. The ministerial ranks are necessarily dominated by the theology of pastors who, through years of devoted and eminent service, have justly attained positions of leadership

in their respective denominations. But in very recent years the *method* of theological inquiry has undergone radical changes, amounting to absolute reversal. Anyone in sympathy with the modern method of procedure, applied to all departments of investigation, cannot find it possible to indorse unqualifiedly the old method common to mediæval science, philosophy, and theology, and still retained, in some degree, by theology. That the old, deductive, method has persisted and still continues in some schools of theological thought, while in all other departments it has yielded to the modern inductive method, is, rightly understood, one of the greatest possible tributes to the value of religion to human life. But because the method is changing, many of the advocates of the old theology fear that the substance and essentials of Christian truth are also being swept aside, and just there, precisely, is the gist of the problem of the separation between churches and theological seminaries — a separation which is not only fatal to both, but which, because of the value attached to religious truth by both sides, is maintained with an insistence too often amounting to harsh criticism and bitter feeling quite out of keeping with the fundamental rule of Christianity, but called forth simply because what every believer considers the fundamental conceptions of Chris-

tianity mean so much to him. Our modern general chaos of theology, and this breach between churches and seminaries on account of certain absolutely irreconcilable antinomies in method between the old and the new theology (affecting *in no instance the essentials* of Christianity, but supposed by those ignorant of the task of the new theology to affect all the essentials), are, I believe, directly responsible for the universally recognized and astonishingly rapid loss of influence on the part of the church. It is absurd to suppose that the theological school can prosper without the church or that the church can prosper without the theological school to keep prospective ministers in sympathy with the spirit and methods of the times. This practical sympathy and co-operation with the culture and methods of the times is the only way in which the church can make a successful appeal to any given age. It was the method adopted by Jesus, by his disciples, and by the epoch-making religious leaders of every age. That last statement will be challenged, of course, but only by those who forget to discriminate between the method of presentation and the material presented ; who forget that Jesus used the terminology and the generally accepted ideas of Judaism as the social and intellectual vehicles for his message ; who forget that Paul's theology

has the most rigid bonds of relationship and union with the social and philosophical ideas of his time. The function of the theological seminary is not to make Christians, but to put the Christian possession of prospective ministers in such form that there will be no barrier between the minister and the educated man of his time. Without such a service on the part of the theological school the church will not only lose ground rapidly, but will gradually degenerate into all manner of schisms and sects, dissipating her energy in religious fads and makeshifts and free-lanceism.

This break between the theological school and the church, in Protestant ranks, has another most serious result. It forces young men of the fine equipment and scientific training of the modern college either to give up all hope and purpose of entering the ministry or to prepare for it with the assured prospect of critical opposition, with the only alternative of keeping the peace by doubtful and equivocal compromise with their own sense of manly independence. Instead of entering joyfully and enthusiastically into the practical work of their ministry, they must go with the fear that some older and wiser pastoral brother may proclaim them "unorthodox," summon a council, examine, pass judgment. Inviting outlook! But it cuts both ways. If the church,

under the tutelage of an old theology, or of any theology, is willing to deny to her young ministers their right to do their own thinking, then she must be resigned to young ministers who do not know how to think, or who, because they do know how, but are not granted their freedom, lose their enthusiasm and joy in the service that ought to be the most exalted and joyful, and finally lose that fine quality of manliness which should be characteristic of the Christian minister.

It would be impossible to find the root of the difficulty in any unworthy intention on either side. If our Protestant theology, even of most modern date, records a long list of theological trials and consequent excommunications and denunciations, it is not because either the judges or the condemned have sought to accomplish any end whatsoever on a basis of personal animus, or even on the basis of a suspicion of the Christian character of the accused. What a strange contradiction the facts present! Men who are declared by all who know them best to be truly Christian in character and spirit are declared unworthy of Christian fellowship in the church or seminary of their choice. In other words, Ecclesiasticism is worth more than Christianity! It would be manifestly unfair and cruelly unjust to accuse the theologian of insin-

cerity. If he were insincere, he would always agree with everyone, and so avoid all criticism; and certainly from the standpoint of practical necessity, if not from the higher standpoint of fellowship with his ministerial brethren, he can ill afford to have his theology condemned. On the other hand, it would be equally unfair to accuse the examining council of insincerity. The difficulty does not reside in bad faith or insincerity on either side.

What can re-establish harmony and sympathy between the theological school and the church? Shall the former give up its independence of thought and method, and teach only *what* and *how* the church shall dictate through her representative pastors? In that case the theological school would be precisely in the position of the medical school which depended, for the content of its scientific training of prospective physicians and surgeons, upon the recipes and dictation of men of some years of medical experience, instead of relying upon the independent research and progressive thought of men whose sole business is to discover new and better methods by means of every aid which the modern laboratory, scientifically equipped, can bring to them.

I believe, and dare to affirm most emphatically, that the whole trouble from which churches and theological seminaries are suffering deplora-

bly today arises simply in a misunderstanding of the real issue between the old and the new theology. I would also affirm no less emphatically that the real issue is solely a question of *method*, and that the assumption or suspicion that the new theology will "dethrone Christ," become "materialistic and anti-spiritual," "undervalue the Scriptures," is one of the most absurd phenomena in the religious world today. That the new theology will cut away some of the old system and narrow its task to a more essentially Christian and less speculative undertaking is doubtless true. But who would dare to affirm that this does not need to be done? Because I thus judged the issue between the old and the new theology and felt the real character and inspiration of the new, and because I believed that Professor Lobstein's book would clear the field of debate of all misunderstanding as to the real issue, and help to make the debate a kindly discussion and enthusiastic inquiry after truth, which would increase, instead of diminish, fellowship between representatives of various points of view, I obtained his permission to translate his Introduction several years ago. I regret that the work has been unavoidably delayed by other routine duties.

I trust that those who read the book may find in it not only the answer to many questions con-

cerning the new theology, but also the decided scientific impulse and guidance, and above all the spiritual light and help, by which the book immediately commended itself to the readers of the original text.

ARTHUR MAXSON SMITH.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,

November 15, 1902.

## CONTENTS.

	<small>PAGE</small>
<b>TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE</b> - - - - -	v-xii
<b>PREFACE</b> - - - - -	xv-xxi
<b>CHAPTER I. The Traditional Conception of Dogma</b> - - - - -	I
I. Philological analysis - - - - -	2
II. Psychological analysis - - - - -	9
III. Historical analysis - - - - -	15
<b>CHAPTER II. The Transformation of the Idea of Dogma in the Protestant Church</b> - - - - -	23
I. Absolute contradiction between the traditional idea of dogma and the religious principle of Protestantism - - - - -	23
II. Necessity of a dogmatic expression of the Protestant faith - - - - -	35
III. Characteristics of the Protestant conception of dogma - - - - -	48
<b>CHAPTER III. The Actual Task of Protestant Dogmatics</b> - - - - -	58
I. The necessary correlation between the notion of dogma and the idea of a dogmatic discipline - - - - -	58
II. Protestant dogmatics and the Christian faith - - - - -	61
III. The scientific independence and practical aim of Protestant dogmatics - - - - -	66
<b>CHAPTER IV. The Source of Protestant Dogmatics</b> - - - - -	74
I. Evangelical faith the source of Protestant dogmatics - - - - -	74
II. Is the religious experience of the Christian the source of Protestant dogmatics? - - - - -	80
III. Attempt at a solution of the problem - - - - -	90
<b>CHAPTER V. The Norm of Protestant Dogmatics</b> - - - - -	97
Nature of the question; the problem of the norm of dogmatics is equivalent to that of authority in matters of faith - - - - -	97

I. Elimination of the legal authority of Confessions of Faith - - - - -	99
II. Elimination of the legal authority of the Holy Scriptures - - - - -	115
III. Attempt at a positive solution - - - - -	126
<b>CHAPTER VI. The Method of Protestant Dogmatics - - - - -</b>	<b>142</b>
I. Elimination of methods incompatible with the religious principle of Protestant dogmatics - - - - -	143
1. The method of authority - - - - -	143
2. The speculative method - - - - -	148
II. Attempt at a positive solution - - - - -	158
III. The sciences auxiliary to Protestant dogmatics and its place in the circle of theological disciplines - - - - -	180
<b>CHAPTER VII. The Organism of Protestant Dogmatics - - - - -</b>	<b>209</b>
I. Critical examination of the principal methods of dogmatic classification adopted in the Protestant church - - - - -	210
II. Attempt at a positive solution.—The christocentric classification the logical result of the Protestant principle - - - - -	219
1. The dominating rôle of Christology and soteriology - - - - -	222
2. The doctrine of God - - - - -	232
3. The doctrine of creation - - - - -	238
4. The doctrine of Providence - - - - -	240
5. Anthropology - - - - -	244
6. Subjective realization of salvation and its individual and collective appropriation - - - - -	251
7. Eschatology - - - - -	253
8. The doctrine of the Trinity - - - - -	256
III. Critical examination of the objections to the christocentric point of view - - - - -	259

## PREFACE.

Object and limits of this treatise.—Difficulties presented in the generally adopted plan of prolegomena to dogmatics.—Course pursued in this work.

THE OBJECT, extent, and limits of an introduction to Protestant dogmatics are diversely appreciated by the authors who have most recently treated these subjects. The values placed on these are not more different and often not more contradictory than the solutions given to the problem. Our early dogmatists did not succeed in establishing a unanimous tradition on this point, and today we are far from an agreement as to the manner of conceiving and treating that which is generally called the “prolegomena of Protestant dogmatics.” Schleiermacher took for the basis of his dialectic and religious masterpiece several borrowed theses drawn from ethics, from the philosophy of religion, and from apologetics;<sup>1</sup> after him a great number of theologians, combining with Schleiermacher’s propositions certain texts bor-

<sup>1</sup> *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 1830<sup>2</sup>, pp. 3-14. Schleiermacher borrowed from ethics, from philosophy of religion, and from apologetics the propositions of the church, religion, and Christianity.

rowed from the early dogmaticians, placed in the plan of their prolegomena a series of general questions pertaining at once to the philosophy of religion and to Christian dogmatics, and intended to guide the reader provisionally in the labyrinth of dogmatic opinions and systems.

Such is, for example, the treatment by E. Schérer in his *Prolégomènes à la dogmatique de l'Église réformée* (1843). Dogmatics necessarily presupposing the existence of a religious society, Schérer first analyzes the idea of the Reformed church :

Now, that idea contains several notions which form, so to speak, its genesis. These notions are religion, revelation, Christianity, the church, and the Reformation. Having compassed that series of ideas, we have obtained a view of the dogmatic ground which we are to explore, and from the midst of which we are to take our point of departure.<sup>1</sup>

Although French dogmaticians have not all treated prolegomena in the same ample manner, still they too have in various degrees attributed to the introduction to dogmatics a series of problems which, to tell the truth, belong to dogmatics itself.

This rôle assigned to prolegomena does not seem to me to conform to its true mission. On the other hand, it encounters serious difficulties. The objections which it raises are not a ques-

<sup>1</sup> P. 3.

tion of terminology; they affect the very foundation of theological science and strike at the very life of the problems to be treated. Indeed, to analyze, as Schérer does, the idea of Protestant dogmatics and that of the Reformed church, to develop the content of these two notions—is not this to answer in advance the questions which a dogmatic system alone is expected to solve? How can the essence of religion be treated independently of all reflection upon God and Man? Is it not evident that every attempt to define religion presupposes and implies a doctrine resting upon the two terms (God and Man) the synthesis of which the idea of religion seeks? That is, the theologian will be obliged to make preliminary excursions into the camp of Christian dogmatics, or he must consider as implicitly solved those problems of which he possesses as yet only the elements. For example, again, the idea of revelation and the conception of miracle cannot be examined with results except in the light of a general view of God, Man, and the World. But the theologian has neither the occasion nor the means of developing and establishing that general view. Likewise, researches on the origin and character of the Holy Scripture, on its inspiration<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup>“Far from being the primary question which dogmatics can and ought to solve, the theory of inspiration can hardly be other

authority, are entirely dependent upon our manner of comprehending the essence of Christianity, the significance of the historical element in the Christian religion, the relation of the Old to the New Dispensation, the rôle of the church and its relation to the individual. These problems, then, the theologian will decide only provisionally; he will not discuss questions of principle, except with the privilege of revision, soliciting of the patience of his readers a blank check, as it were, which he will not fill in until later—a vote of confidence which he will feel compelled to justify in the course of his labor, but which for the moment is an act of *fides implicita*, little in harmony, to be sure, with the Protestant conscience.

But will the dogmatician attempt a twofold treatment of identical material, first a provisional treatment, taking no account of connected subjects, then later re-establishing the broken line of central doctrines of Christianity and the questions of principle formerly examined? Such a study in double entry would run the risk of producing troublesome misunderstandings, idle repetitions, and those developments which sometimes infringe upon ground later explored, sometimes repeat subjects already treated. In either case the unity

than one of the last."—PH. BRIDEL, *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses*, Vol. XII (Paris, 1882), p. 110.

of the system and the clearness of exposition would be compromised by a process which would entangle at every point the thread of theological argumentation.

What, then, should be the method of treatment, and how can these difficulties be avoided? It is necessary to eliminate a series of problems which the majority of theologians assign to prolegomena and which really are integral elements of the organism of Christian doctrine. It is necessary to narrow the scope of our introduction to the subjects which are directly related to its field, and which it is possible to elucidate without constantly encroaching upon ground which, as yet, is foreign to our researches. It is necessary, finally, to limit ourselves to the questions of principle and method which naturally spring from Protestant dogmatics itself, and which are clearly indicated to us by the nature of that science. What an introduction will thus lose in breadth it will gain in strength and depth. It will doubtless be impossible to avoid completely all *a priori* matter; in spite of every attempt to the contrary, it will be necessary at times to anticipate subjects which will reappear in the body of the dogmatic system, but it will not be forgotten that proved assertions are distinctly different from those which will not be indicated without provision for testing and re-establishing them later in the work. Thus by

keeping in view the resources at its disposal, by confining itself within its proper limits, an introduction to dogmatics, far from abandoning its rightful ground, gives to the superstructure of the system a stronger foundation; it determines and guides future researches; it is assured, if not of success, at least of a clear and purposeful procedure.<sup>1</sup>

Thus conceived, our method cannot be doubtful. We will ask, first, what is understood by dogma? That question answered, we shall be in a position to show what should be the actual task of Protestant dogmatics. Researches bearing on this subject will be considered in view of the following problems, so much discussed: What are the sources of Protestant dogmatics? What is its norm? What is its principle? To answer these questions will be to determine the method which belongs to Protestant dogmatics; it will be, at the same time, to assign to each part its place in the organism of theology, and to indicate those sciences whose assistance are necessary to it. Finally, there will be an attempt to classify precisely the matter to be treated, to outline the divisions of the system, and to show the bond

<sup>1</sup> Many of the dogmaticians of our day follow the method I have indicated. For example, A. Schweitzer, Dorner, Nitzsch. A few place the preliminary questions of research after the Christian verity or after the theory of knowledge (Lipsius, Dorner, Frank, Cremer, Kaehler).

which unites each element of dogmatics with the principle which engenders and sustains it.

In tracing this program, I am not unmindful of the difficulties presented in its execution. Various works have recently treated the majority of the points which we will touch upon in this introduction. I shall cite the principal ones, without pretending to exhaust the entire number; but I shall be careful to place in the notes the bibliographical references and details of pure erudition; that will be the only means of clearing the order of exposition without compromising its strength.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The references in the original are confined almost exclusively to French and German literature, which would be either inaccessible or useless to those for whom this translation has been prepared, hence are very largely omitted from this translation.—[TRANSLATOR.]



## CHAPTER I.

### THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION OF DOGMA.

I. *Philological analysis.*—Etymology and meaning of the word “dogma.”—Classical Greek: the political and philosophical meaning of the term.—Biblical Greek: the version of the Septuagint, of the New Testament.—Ecclesiastical Greek: changes in the use of the term; return to the philosophical usage; restriction to the theoretical sphere; dogma differentiated from popular preaching and moral and practical decisions.—Result of the philological inquiry.

II. *Psychological analysis.*—The primitive phenomenon of piety and the secondary character of dogma.—Evolutionary force and manifold manifestations of religious sentiment: place of dogma in the series of various expressions of piety.—Rôle of a community in the transformation of a doctrine into dogma: the idea of collectivity, the idea of authority.

III. *Historical analysis.*—The illusion common to the Roman church, to Protestant orthodoxy, and to the Hegelian school: dogma, the organic flowering and adequate expression of religious faith.—Foreign factors which enter into that analysis; necessity of a constant study of the history of dogma.—Characteristic stages of doctrinal evolution: the Christian religion’s progressive assimilation of philosophical knowledge, the formation of the Catholic church, the official sanction of the State.—Result of the historical inquiry: dogma is obligatory belief decreed by an infallible church and sanctioned by an absolute State.—Agreement of the threefold philological, psychological, and historical analyses.—The problem which this imposes on the theologian: does the traditional conception of dogma correspond to the religious principle of Protestantism?

BEFORE determining the actual task of Protestant dogmatics it is necessary to establish the

precise meaning which is to be attached to the conception of dogma.<sup>1</sup> Recent arguments as to the necessity or uselessness of dogma, the dogmatic or non-dogmatic character of the Christian religion, biblical or pretended biblical dogmas, have been at once as passionate as they have been sterile, because very often those who have debated have neglected to give their understanding of the term in question. To the questions, "Does the New Testament contain dogmas? Was the Reformation the end of dogmas? Do we need a new dogma?" one may answer affirmatively or negatively, according to the meaning which he attaches to the word "dogma." We cannot see, therefore, how it is possible to dispense with the preliminary work of an examination of this problem. We will begin by examining the traditional idea of dogma which, borrowed by our reformers from the Roman church and propagated by Protestant orthodoxy, still more or less certainly dominates contemporary theology.

## I.

Let us first establish the results of a philosophical analysis of the term "dogma." The word

<sup>1</sup>I am pleased to note that Bovon has also followed the method I have adopted. He says: "In order to know what dogmatism is, it is necessary to determine first in what dogma consists."—*Dogmatique chrétienne*, Vol. I, p. 1.

has a history in which one may distinguish three periods, or rather three groups of usage, which frequently border on each other, or even overlap. It is accordingly necessary to examine successively the signification of the term in the classical Greek, in the terminology of the Septuagint and of the New Testament, and in the language of the church Fathers.

In the language of the profane writers of the classical age and the succeeding period, the word "dogma" is attached directly to the verb from which it is derived, *δοκεῖ μοι, ἔδοξε ταῦτα, visum est, placuit*, "it seems good." It has primarily the same meaning as the past participle *τὸ δεδογμένον*; it designates a decision, an ordinance, a decree, a measure decreed by the senate, or a law promulgated by the popular assembly and sanctioned by an authority universally recognized.<sup>1</sup>

In the political, civil, and social sphere, the term passes over into the philosophical domain. The word occurs in this sense rarely in Plato, more often in Aristotle, very frequently in Plutarch, and, with various shades of meaning, in the

<sup>1</sup> The term is frequently synonymous with the word *ψήφισμα*, cf. POLYBIUS, X, §4, §6; III, §27, 7; *δόγματα τῆς συγκλήτου*, "decrees of the senate," cf. HERODIANUS, VII, §10, §8. It is also synonymous with "law," "ordinance," PLATO, *De Leg.*, I, §644, D; *κοινὸν πόλεως δόγμα*, cf. the expression *δόγμα ποιεῖσθαι*, "to decree," "to decide," XENOPHON, *Anabasis*, III, §3, 5.

majority of the schools of philosophy. The signification of the term changes according to the character of the schools in which it is used. With the Pythagoreans the word *δόγματα*, a synonym of *στοιχεῖα*, designates the elementary principles and truths. The Stoics understood by dogmas the axioms, the self-evident propositions, accepted by all men and clothed with this title of indisputable authority. In a passage often quoted Cicero recalls that the philosophers call dogmas the certain and fundamental truths decreed by the wisdom which ought not to doubt either itself or its decisions.<sup>1</sup> Conformably to the practical character of their philosophy, the Stoics recommended that these truths should be made the regulative principles of conduct.<sup>2</sup> The skeptic philosophers, holding that the human spirit cannot attain truth, called dogmas the opinions which pretend to a certitude inaccessible to man, not capable of proof, and leaning upon simple authority. Hence the disfavor which, after that time, attached to the terms "dogmas," "dogmatics," "dogmatism." Finally Kant opposed dogmatism to criticism. The former dares to affirm before it gives account of the conditions of knowledge; the latter examines the resources

<sup>1</sup> CICERO, *Quæstiones academicæ*, IV, § 9.

<sup>2</sup> SENECA, *Epist.* 95; MARCUS AURELIUS, II, § 3; III, § 6; IV, § 3.

at the disposal of reason before it risks the building of any system. Whatever the variety of schools or systems may be, the term "dogma" designates, in the philosophical language of the profane Greek, a principle, an opinion, a theoretical or practical doctrinal point.

This philosophical meaning of the term "dogma" is foreign to the biblical language of the Old and New Testaments.

In the Septuagint the terms *δόγμα, δογματίζειν*, are employed in the political sense which we find in the classical writers; they signify a legislative disposition, a decree, a royal edict. The Hebrew words of the original text are immaterial; the meaning common to all these expressions is the same and is confined within the limits traced by the primitive usage of the profane Greek. Dan. 6:8, 9; 2:13; 3:10, 29; 2 Macc. 10:8; 15:36.

In the New Testament the word *δόγμα* occurs only five times.<sup>1</sup> The political significance is found in two passages. In Luke 2:1, the imperial edict ordering a census of the inhabitants of the empire is called *δόγμα*. According to the book of Acts (17:7), Paul and Silas are accused by their Jewish adversaries of acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, *ἀπέναντι τῶν δογμάτων*

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 2:23 must be excluded; it should read *τὸ διάταγμα* (not *τὸ δόγμα*) *τοῦ βασιλέως*.

*καίσαρος πράσσουσιν.* In two of Paul's epistles (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15; cf. 2 Cor., chaps. 3 and 4) the Judaic ordinances from which Jesus Christ has freed Christians bear the name of "dogmas;" in both cases the term is employed with a meaning of great disfavor; it serves to characterize "the imperative letter and statutory form of the law, in opposition to the spiritual essence of the Gospel and of the ministry of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup> In another passage in the New Testament the *δόγματα* designate the practical decisions adopted by the church of Jerusalem in view of the separation of the two elements of the Christian society. Paul and Timothy "went on their way through the cities" delivering "them the decrees for to keep, which had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4). Moreover, referring to the discussions of the Conference of Jerusalem, the sacred writer, relating the famous decree promulgated by the apostles, suggests to us the bond which exists between the term *δόγμα* and the verb from which it is derived. "It seemed good (*ἔδοξεν*) to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication" (Acts 15:28, 29; see vss. 22 and 25). Such is

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER, *Revue chrétienne*, Vol. I (1892), p. 24.

the usage of "dogma" in the New Testament. "The sacred writers never apply the word 'dogma' to evangelical truth, neither do they represent that truth as imposed upon men as a legal text or a decision of an emperor or an assembly."<sup>1</sup> The terms which designate evangelical preaching are void of all scientific pretension and official sanction; they are essentially religious and popular in character.<sup>2</sup>

What, finally, is the meaning of the word "dogma" in the ecclesiastical language of the early centuries? The Fathers did not derive its sacred meaning from the New Testament; they followed the traditions of the philosophical schools of Greece, notably those of Stoicism. The increasing ascendancy which the spirit and methods of ancient philosophy gained in the Christian church appears in the application of the word "dogma" to the Christian verity. Although the majority of the ancient Fathers had not yet distinguished between the theoretical and practical sides of Christian doctrines, more and more the word "dogma" was applied to the intellectual truths placed under the sanction of the Old Testament, of Christ, and the apostles.<sup>3</sup> That

<sup>1</sup> BOVON, *Dogmatique chrétienne*, Vol. I, p. 3, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:1; Mat. 4:23; Rom. 1:1, 3; 10:17; Col. 3:16; Eph. 6:17.

<sup>3</sup> ORIGEN, *Contra Cels.* III, 39; CHRYSOSTUM, *In Ep. ad*

progressive restriction of the term to the theoretical and speculative sphere is explained by the evolution of Christian thought which, after the Apologists, tended to resolve Christianity into a new philosophy, a revealed philosophy forming an extension of natural theology. It is true that there are some passages which show that certain teachers were conscious of the human element inherent in Christian doctrines, also passages which speak of the dogmas of heretics or pagans; but these are exceptions, and the majority of the Fathers reserved the name "dogma" for revealed truths; that is, truths sanctioned by tradition.

The meaning of the word was still more precisely determined and limited by certain expressions which, especially among the writers of the fourth century, were distinguished from the term "dogmas." The primitive unity which maintained between the practical and the intellectual truths of Christianity began to relax, and finally dissolved altogether. Clement of Alexandria, describing the didactic and pedagogic work of the Logos, distinguishes the practical offices from those which concern dogmatic things.<sup>1</sup> The same divorce occurs between the doctrinal

*Philip. Homil. 6; EUSEBIUS, Hist. eccles., VII, 30; IX, 5; cf. VINCENT. LIRIN., Commonit., I, 23; Prisca coelestis philosophiae dogmata.*

<sup>1</sup> CLEM. ALEX., *Paedag.*, I, 1.

and the practical element in Cyril of Jerusalem, Meletius of Antioch, Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodoret. Thus was constituted the dualism which dominated Greek and Roman Catholicism. "Christianity found itself divided into two parts: on one hand was a series of intellectual truths which must be admitted; on the other hand was a series of moral precepts which must be realized in conduct. The sum of these two constituted faith."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the terminology of the Fathers opposed the scientific formulation of the Christian faith to the popular preaching of the Gospel; the latter was called *κήρυγμα*, the former *δόγμα*.

If the texts furnished by the history of the word "dogma" are collected and established, it will be found that the analogy with the philosophical usage of the term prevailed in the church; moreover, the political conception in usage with the profane writers, the conception of authority, of a decree, of legal sanction, combined with the philosophical usage, so that the word "dogma" came to be a synonym for "authoritative instruction," "obligatory belief," sanctioned by tradition.

## II.

It would be superficial to stop with the theological evolution of the term *δόγμα* without

<sup>1</sup>SABATIER, *Revue chrétienne* (1892), I, p. 25.

attempting to understand, beyond the expression, the idea, or rather the living content, which found its scientific formulation in the dogma. A psychological analysis of the genesis of dogma will throw considerable light on the history of the word.

To affirm the derived and secondary character of dogma would be a superfluous statement which is no longer contradicted. The primary phenomenon is piety, the inner life of the spirit in conscious relationship with divinity. The essential distinction between religion and theology, more especially between faith and dogma—a distinction not recognized by any of the forms of intellectualism—is one of the fundamental axioms of contemporary religious philosophy. Schleiermacher<sup>1</sup> was the first to bring this distinction out into full light; but, prior to Schleiermacher, it was indicated by Spinoza, Semler, Lessing, De Wette. Among French theologians, Benjamin Constant and Vinet recognized this distinction which, in our day, is generally accepted.

Sabatier, commenting on one of Rothe's excellent studies,<sup>2</sup> says: "Dogma is not a flower of the springtime; it is an autumn fruitage, and it

<sup>1</sup> See especially *Der christliche Glaube*, 15-19 ("Vom Verhältniss der Dogmatik zur christlichen Frömmigkeit").

<sup>2</sup> *Zur Dogmatik* (Gotha, 1869), art. I.

presupposes, before its ripening, a long period of growth."<sup>1</sup> The root of dogma is found in religious experience, produced or awakened by an objective factor, in which piety recognizes a divine manifestation, a revelation. The religious sentiment exists prior to theological formula. To be sure, religious sentiment, from its first appearance, is never void of intellectual elements. Piety implies and contains conceptions more or less obscure, judgments more or less confused. To affirm the absolute isolation of religious emotion and its fundamental independence with regard to all manifestation of intelligence would be to destroy the indissoluble unity of the faculties of the soul and make a scission in the life of the individual amounting to mutilation. If we confine ourselves to the statement of that which collective and individual experience invariably attests, it is this: Dogmatic formulation is a relatively tardy product of the religious life. Before extending to the scientific sphere, subjective religion seeks its expression in the domain of the imagination and of the will. The feeling of piety, expressing itself outwardly, first assumes a concrete and perceptible form in the image, the symbol, sacred poesy, mythology. Humanity, in its religious development, follows a course analogous to that of the child. The imaginative faculties develop

<sup>1</sup>*Revue chrétienne* (1892), I, p. 35.

prior to dogmatic reflection. The child rushes into the world of poesy, and the loftiest religious truths are accessible to his heart, but in the forms and colors with which his fancy clothes them. In this first phase of his development, in which the emotional impressions dominate, it is very evident that the intelligence is exercised and that thought does not rest inactive ; but the concept is not yet distinguished from emotion, and the form which faith assumes is æsthetic, not scientific.

The form of expression which piety borrows from poesy is essentially individual. But subjective religion struggles to free itself from that limited sphere. The evolutionary power which is inherent in it exercises a ruling influence and is endowed with an extraordinarily communicative virtue ; it attracts and holds together the souls and consciences which it unites, not only by common emotions, but as well by the bond of religious rites and cult.<sup>1</sup> “ Man loves to bear witness before others and with others. He loves to transfer to their spirits the sentiments by which he is moved, and to feel in himself the sympathetic transmission of the sentiments which animate

<sup>1</sup> Bovon, analyzing the distinctive characteristics of sentiment, denies that it possesses the power of communication, and declares that it is “incommunicable and intransmissible” (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 14). That assertion seems to me to be contradicted by the consensus of testimony of psychology and history.

them."<sup>1</sup> Now cult, in all religions, is not only a means of realizing the union of man with the divine ; it has also a collective import, an eminently social significance. In the ceremonies of religious cult, especially in sacrifices, man seeks to reunite, to re-establish, to fortify the bond which holds him to his god, and he also tends to affirm his solidarity with those who profess the same religion ; he actualizes the individual and the collective will.

It is on this account also that piety expresses itself objectively in social institutions, as the soul reveals and realizes itself in the body. The primitive civilization of all peoples is composed of similar institutions, created and sanctioned by religion. Without in any manner treating adequately the much-controverted problem of the relation of religion to morality, it is nevertheless possible to affirm that a large number of the moral precepts and usages, in all countries and all times, have been the direct products of religious sentiment.

Dogma has its place among these particular forms of subjective religion ; it is "one of the languages which faith speaks."<sup>2</sup> Like symbols, myths, rites, moral and social institutions, it draws its substance and its justification from the reli-

<sup>1</sup> RÉVILLE, *Préliminaires de l'histoire des religions* (Paris, 1881), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> CH. BOIS, *Revue théologique*, 1890, p. 162.

gious life, from piety. It is, in general, much more recent than the other products of religious sentiment, for it involves scientific reflection which is awakened and exercised much later than the imagination and the will. None the less true is it that every dogma worthy of the name sinks its roots into the soil of the religious life, begun or developed under the influence of an objective factor, a natural phenomenon, or a historical fact. That is the living source of dogma which has its formal development in the intellectual elaboration of religious data. The formal element of dogma is always suggested and determined by scientific reflection which is assisted in turn by the materials furnished by the intellectual and moral culture, the prevailing philosophy, and the general environment of scientific knowledge of a given epoch.

However, dogma is not identical with religious belief, or with an article of faith scientifically formulated. In order that dogma may become established, it is necessary that the scientific expression of religious truth shall fulfil a double condition or assume a double character; dogma must have attached to it an idea of collectivity and an idea of authority.

The individual decision of a doctor of theology does not suffice to give birth to a dogma; dogma is a product of the religious society, of

the church. The religious development, some of the stages of which I have indicated, does not lead to the constitution of dogma unless it takes place within a community of believers. The authority of an individual cannot transform an opinion into dogma; the sanction of the church is necessary. It is in the bosom of the church and by the will of the church that dogma takes on a concrete and historical form. The church affirms its thought in dogma, and it demands the assent of its members to the doctrine which it has formulated; dogma claims the authority of law within the church which has promulgated it. There are doubtless different conceptions of dogma and of religious society, of the faith which it demands and the authority it exercises; but never and in no wise could dogma be individual or arbitrary; it presupposes always a church which formulates it, an authority which establishes it. The ideas of religious association and religious authority express and condition themselves in the conception of dogma; without these there may be individual beliefs and popular doctrines, but not dogmas.

### III.

The psychological analysis which we have just sketched is strengthened and supplemented by a historical analysis which both confirms and illustrates the foregoing observations.

If the evolution above traced could always take place under normal conditions, dogma would invariably be the correct and adequate expression, the legitimate fruit of faith. But history proves that the process has not been thus normal. The dogmatic development has never proceeded in direct lines, but at every point has been entangled with factors foreign to the religious principle which primarily gave the impulse to theological thought. The application of a critical historical method to the study of dogmas has abolished the illusion which considered dogmatic development an organic flowering and unfolding of the religious germ. This false conception of the genesis and development of dogma is common to the Roman church, to Protestant orthodoxy, and to the Hegelian school. According to the Catholic idea, the dogmatic tradition is simply the evolution, ever more distinct, and the affirmation, ever more precise, of the truths latent in the primitive consciousness of the church which, in her opposition to heresy and schism, is compelled to define and formulate dogma, without these formulas and definitions adding anything new to the effective treasury of the religious revelations in the possession of the church. According to Protestant orthodoxy, the chain of Christian truths, unbroken during the early centuries of the church, later broken by the mistakes and errors

of Rome, was renewed by the Reformation, and thenceforth continued to gain in strength, being enriched by new links, so that between the scriptural revelation and confessional orthodoxy the historical continuity of Christian truth has been perfectly re-established. According to the Hegelian school, dogma is the result of an inner necessity, identical with the laws which govern the development of the Absolute, and repeating themselves with a fatal and hopeless monotony, according to the threefold scheme of thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

One of the errors common to these three conceptions of religious development results from ignorance of the real conditions of life and of history. The careful and independent observer of the facts will be easily convinced that the evolution of dogma is far from being always a spontaneous flowering of the Christian principle; that factors foreign to faith have mingled with the factors which are peculiar to faith; that that which is and has been does not necessarily have to be forever; that the dogmatic elaboration of the church has contained gropings in the dark, recoils, and deviations; that political interests and passions, practical needs of cult and organization, the ruling methods and traditions of philosophy and science, have powerfully acted upon the formation of ecclesiastical dogma; that, finally, and

above all, personalities, men of thought, of piety, of action, have left their stamp upon the conception and molding of the formulas of faith.

After all, it is men who make history, men with their varied needs, their peculiar aptitudes, their individual tendencies. They are immersed, no doubt, in the general current; they belong to it and follow it; but they are distinguished from it, nevertheless, and they pursue it ever with the necessity of maintaining in it a personal factor of assimilation and reproduction.\*

It is necessary to take account of all these data in order to comprehend the value of the traditional idea of dogma and to appreciate the historical formation of that idea. In a word, the notion itself is only the necessary result of an actual development; the theory of dogma has been deduced from the concrete realization of dogma; the former is the abstract idea, or, as it were, the reflection of the latter.

A full account of the history of this development cannot be given here. It must suffice to indicate some of the characteristic stages of the evolution which established dogma as an obligatory belief decreed by an infallible church and sanctioned by an absolute state.

The first important fact to be noted is the progressive approximation of the Christian religion to philosophical knowledge. Under the influence of the Hellenic spirit, theology endeavored to

\* G. FROMMEL, *Revue chrétienne*, 1894, p. 49.

transform moral and religious truth into an objective and impersonal creed. Is it necessary to demonstrate that, in the thought of Jesus and the apostles, Christian truth was not independent of the affections of the heart and of the determinations of the will? It implies, for its recognition and acceptance, a moral and religious disposition of the subject; it is eminently personal; to assimilate and propagate it there is need of souls thirsting for righteousness, consciences that render homage to the supremacy of moral obligation, lives that aspire to a realization of the ideal. Therefore are repentance and faith the strait gate into the Kingdom of God; therefore are childlike hearts first in the kingdom; therefore, when God wished to reveal unto us the moral and religious life in all its fullness, he raised up in our midst a perfect personality, a perfectly illumined consciousness, shining as the sun which bears healing and light in its rays. Such is the essential character of the Christian truth. The Apologists and Greek Fathers committed a strange and fatal error when, transporting into the religious sphere the processes of ancient metaphysics, they tried to make of the Christian faith an objective science of revealed things, an impersonal and transcendental philosophy, a supremely rational theory supplementing and correcting human, finite wisdom. According to these

teachers, Christian certitude and natural certitude are not different in kind ; they differ in degree, not in nature. Moreover, the Fathers, like the teachers of the Middle Ages, after they had put religious knowledge on a precise level with philosophical and scientific knowledge, undertook to force both into a unitary, magnificent system, a vast encyclopedia embracing at once physics and ethics, psychology and theodicy, God and man, heaven and earth. Is it strange that, under these conditions, faith became more and more a mere creed cut off from the moral life and needing the external complement of works and priestly manipulation?

While, under the sway of Greek Philosophy, *πίστις*<sup>1</sup> was being resolved into an elementary *γνῶσις*,<sup>2</sup> the formation of the Catholic church involved still other consequences. In order to make a defense against heresies and to react against the alterations of Christianity, the churches expressed their tradition in rules of faith; they fixed the canon of inspired books; they affirmed the bond which united them and the line which separated them from the gnostics; they realized outwardly their solidarity in the episcopate and announced it by claiming the attributes of unity, catholicity, apostolicity. Each of these attributes contains, in the germ, the

<sup>1</sup> Faith.

<sup>2</sup> Knowledge.

claim of infallibility. The creeds proclaimed by the councils, the confessions formulated by them, were considered to be revealed truths; they exacted the assent of all the faithful; to reject them was to bring down upon oneself the blow of the condemnation and anathema of the church. It was also to deprive oneself of Roman citizenship, since, after the fourth century, religious and ecclesiastical excommunication involved civil and political condemnation. The Code of Justinian required of every citizen of the empire adherence to the symbols of Nicæa, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. *Faith (fides)* was identified with the *rule of faith (lex fidei)*. Thus was established the traditional conception of dogma, which ruled in the Greek and Roman church, and which was expressed alike in the significance which both political and ecclesiastical language gave to the term "dogma."

It is very evident, in effect, that dogma, in its precise and historic sense, is nothing other than a creed officially defined and formulated by a competent authority, that is to say, in this case, by the church going hand in hand with the State. History does not authorize us to call every scientific expression of religious faith a dogma; it is necessary to reserve that name for a formula which has acquired the force of law in the church, and which participates in the authori-

ty of that church. This is not an arbitrary definition; it grows necessarily out of the historical development of the notion and the term "dogma." Nor is it an idle definition, for it is far from being generally received, and it is foreseen that it will occasion many objections.

These objections are inspired and dominated apparently by the very strong belief that, according to the definition given, it would be impossible to have dogmas, except in the closed camp of Greek and Roman Catholicism. Moreover, neither the Reformation of the sixteenth century nor the later Protestantism meant to renounce dogma. A coat of arms proclaiming a Christianity without dogma arouses the most serious opposition from the ranks on all sides. The very existence of Protestant dogmatics seems to give force to this opposition. Never will the churches which issued from the Reformation inscribe upon their banners the uselessness of dogma.

What must we conclude? This: that doctrine has a different value for Protestants than for Greek and Roman Catholics; that our conception of dogma is different from the traditional notion born of the Fathers and the Scholastics; that the idea of dogma has been transformed in the Protestant church.

We shall try to show this.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE IDEA OF DOGMA IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCH.

*I. Absolute contradiction between the traditional idea of dogma and the religious principle of Protestantism.*— How this contradiction is shown in the notion of faith, in the idea of the church, and in the conception of religious authority.— The problem which the Reformation imposes upon Protestant theology: the destruction of the traditional notion of dogma does not imply doctrinal indifference.

*II. Necessity of a dogmatic expression of the Protestant faith.*— The relative, not absolute, value of doctrinal formula.— Dogmatic activity a function of the life of the church.— Twofold character of this activity.— Doctrine is indispensable to the spiritual welfare of the church, and necessary for the purpose of propagating Christian truth, of assisting the practical ministry of the pastor, of facilitating the settlement of confessional and ecclesiastical disputes.— Apologetic and polemic importance of dogma in the conflict of the church with her external adversaries.

*III. Characteristics of the Protestant conception of dogma.*— Dogma the scientific expression of the faith of the Protestant church at a given time.— Analysis and justification of this definition.

#### I.

The traditional conception of dogma which we have established by means of the threefold philological, psychological, and historical analysis is presented in its complete form only in the Catholic church; there it appears in all its strength, shows its true import, and develops its fullest consequences. In order to understand its com-

plete significance it is necessary to consider it in its own environment, and point out the bond which attaches it to the general conception of that church.<sup>1</sup>

God has granted to men his revelation in a precise, fixed, and unchangeable form. Now, he could not have given his revelation without at the same time having given a sure means of apprehending it. This means or medium is the church. One, universal, tangible, known to all. Infallible, it excludes doubt as well as error. Elsewhere, man finds himself on the ground of relative, and consequently uncertain, truths. The church places him in possession of absolute truth. That truth is absolutely objective and impersonal, therefore certain for all men; it ought, therefore, to be received by all. The acceptance of truth received from the hands of the church—that is faith. This faith is essentially an implicit faith; it has been reduced, little by little, to a single article, the creed of the infallible authority of the church, and the duty of submission to it. To

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, that conception of dogma was not formed suddenly, and Bovon says, with reason, that in the ancient church those teachers even less inclined to favor liberty, even those who contributed most to the strengthening of Catholic tradition, did not understand dogma in the exterior and legal sense of later Catholicism (*Dogmatique chrétienne*, I, pp. 7-11); but we can, nevertheless, examine here the history of the traditional idea of dogma, and trace it directly to the limits of its evolution, that is, to the fixed and official conception sanctioned by Catholicism.

believe, for a Catholic, is to admit everything which the church has, does, and will decide; to admit it with closed eyes, and without even knowing in what these decisions consist. The Catholic believes by proxy. Faith, in this system, is a blank check which the believer delivers to the church, and which the latter presumes to fill in. Finally, the top sheaf of this system is this: the church, claiming for herself absolute truth and certitude, does not need to enter into debate; she merely affirms. Only prejudice and bad faith can deny her divinity. Therefore, unbelief (dissent) becomes the most culpable waywardness, and chastisements present themselves as a means, as legitimate as efficacious, for the opening of the heretic's eyes. Wherever the temporal power is ready to lend a hand to the church, orthodoxy is the foundation of common law, and religious error is placed under the ban of nations.

What, then, is dogma in this closed system of affirmations, or, rather, of pretentions? Here is a curious thing: Catholicism has at the same time canonized dogma in theory and neutralized it in practice.

On one hand, in effect, each dogma, that is, each doctrinal decision of the church, is a revealed truth, absolutely free from error; on the other hand, the Catholic believes less in dogmas than in the church. In the different articles of the

*Credo* is it not the church which the believer sees, finds disclosed? Is it not the church that he honors? Although a Catholic may recognize all the Christian dogmas, yet the church, in all these dogmas, would be the real object upon which he would fix his belief. That is, in the Catholic system, particular dogmas have, in fact, lost their importance and their practical significance; in truth, the church demands of her children only one article of faith, namely, submission to the church. Some believe more, others less; no matter, provided they all agree to the fundamental dogma of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The Reformation broke in principle with all legal authority, exterior to the conscience of the believer; for that very reason it renounced implicitly the traditional idea of dogma, a decree supernaturally inspired by God and promulgated by an infallible church.

In attempting to expose the contradiction be-

<sup>1</sup> See what Calvin wrote in the preface of his *Christian Institutes*, addressed to Francis I.: "They easily permit both themselves and others to ignore, neglect, and despise the true religion, which is given to us by the Scriptures, and which ought to be established among all; likewise, whatever anyone may hold or may not hold concerning God and Christ, he must submit his mind, in implicit faith, so they say, to the judgment of the church. And they do not care much if the glory of God be polluted by open blasphemies, provided that no one utters a word against the authority of our holy mother-church, that is, according to their real meaning, against the seat of Rome" (*Corp. Reform.*, II, 14).

tween the traditional notion of dogma and the religious principle of Protestantism, I am careful not to forget that Protestants have acquired only little by little the consciousness of this principle and of the consequences flowing from it. The Reformers themselves were ignorant of the full extent of the work which they accomplished. Like the Catholic church, they attached very great importance to the unity of doctrine; they estimated themselves as the defenders of orthodoxy. They naïvely thought, not that they had substituted a new church for the old, but that they had restored to the church her primitive purity and had renewed the chain of tradition broken by the secular errors of the papacy. This misapprehension is not surprising. God's plan is ever larger than the purpose of the men who are called to execute it. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin opened a door which, after their time, remained open, never to be closed by anyone, and through which we may assuredly enter today without bearing the responsibility for the opinions of Calvin, Zwingli, or Luther.

To show the abiding contradiction between the traditional idea of dogma and the very essence of Protestantism, it suffices to recall what are, according to Protestants, the characteristic attributes of faith, of the church, and of religious authority. To answer this threefold question

will be to disclose the profound antinomy existing between the Catholic notion of dogma and the Protestant conception of the Gospel.

Faith, according to Protestantism, is not mere consent. To believe is not to adhere to an external authority, on the foundation of a testimony foreign to the consciousness of the believer. Faith is an essentially personal conviction, determined by motives of a spiritual order. To believe is to have confidence in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The object of faith, that is to say, the Gospel, is at the same time the author of faith, that is, the divine power which attests itself in the consciousness of the believer, in revealing itself by means of its redemptive and sanctifying effects. In this mysterious work of faith, not one of man's faculties remains inactive; the sentiment, the intelligence, the will participate in that inner act, solicited by the objective factor of a revelation which at the same time frees and binds the subject; everything here bears a moral and spiritual stamp. In the eyes of the Protestant, what Catholicism means by faith, "implicit, unconscious, empty faith, is only the absence of faith."<sup>1</sup> True, living faith is God made known to the mind and heart; it is the divine Spirit giving testimony to our spirit; it is the Lord immanent in the soul of the believer. From

<sup>1</sup> E. SCHÉRER, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the moment of this testimony in the spirit of the believer, all dualism between faith and piety or the Christian life is impossible, or at least is conquered in principle. In the Catholic church faith is without necessary relationship to the Christian life; one may adhere to the Catholic tradition and submit himself to its authority without experiencing the least movement of inner piety, without being awakened to the divine and spiritual life, nay, even while continuing a dissolute and immoral life. From the Protestant point of view, such a divorce between faith and the religious life is a contradiction in terms. If it is true that to believe is to yield oneself to God, to believe is also to live for God and in God. In the measure in which the Protestant separates himself from communion with God he ceases to be Christian, he loses faith; he may be orthodox, he will not be a believer. This religious conception of inner and personal faith is the great spiritual conquest of the Reformation; it marks the authentic return to the religious thought of Jesus and to the fundamental inspiration of apostolic theology. At the same time it implies a break with the Catholic system. If faith is an individual act, an inner decision of the will, an affirmation of our character of moral and religious personality, it is irreconcilable with a doctrine which makes of faith a theoretical belief and a

passive submission; hence it cannot agree with a conception according to which dogma would be merely an infallible decree, exacting the sacrifice of intelligence and imposing itself from without upon the enslaved reason.

If the traditional notion of dogma and the Protestant idea of faith absolutely exclude each other, then the same antinomy maintains between the Catholic theory of dogma and the Protestant conception of the church.

The church, for the Protestant, is not, as for the Catholic, an organism of supernatural graces, the repository and administration of which have been confined to a privileged body; neither is it a vast system of divine guaranties, calculated to assure salvation to those who throw themselves with abandon into the maternal arms of the church. No; Protestants see in the church the communion of believers, and they recognize as Christian every church in which the preaching of the Gospel awakens and quickens a living faith. The center of gravity of the church does not rest in the sacerdotal hierarchy which governs the mass of believers, but in the divine Word which produces faith in the heart. Not the clergy, but Christians, are the church. Therefore, infallibility is not an attribute miraculously conferred upon a person or a group of persons, pope or council; it appertains to the church only in the

measure in which the latter remains faithful to the Gospel. Moreover, the church has not the right to set herself up as a sovereign by publishing decrees after the manner of a legal institution; she has no other mission than that of declaring the Gospel; she is not an absolute ruler, she is a docile bearer of testimony. Doubtless she feels under moral obligation to possess and declare the truth, but she is also sensible that she bears divine treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). Again, Protestantism is careful not to identify the formulas of ecclesiastical dogma with the perfect revelation of the Gospel of Christ. Although our Reformers were convinced that they had brought out into the light the truth announced to the world by the Savior and his apostles, they declared themselves none the less ready to admit their error as soon as it could be pointed out to them that their ideas were not in accord with the pure Gospel. How could such a conception, how could this Protestant idea of the church, be framed into the traditional idea of dogma elaborated by Catholicism?

There is a second striking contradiction between this idea and the Protestant notion of religious authority. At this point, especially, the Reformation has not been consistent with itself nor faithful to the principle which it represents. At first sight it would seem that it maintained

the conception of legal and literal authority, since it substituted the norm of Holy Scripture for the rule of tradition. But, if we look farther and go to the bottom of the matter, we shall easily see that Protestantism has profoundly transformed the evangelical notion of authority in matters of faith. To be convinced of this it suffices to recall to mind the foundation which Protestants give to the authority of the Scriptures. That foundation is not the suffrage of tradition; it is the testimony of the Spirit of God which, in the heart of the believer, responds to the divine inspiration of the sacred writers, and realizes between the Christian consciousness and revealed truth a relation of profound affinity and holy correspondence. How great a difference, thus, between authority in the Catholic sense and the authority to which Protestant faith adheres ! Authority, in Catholicism, is the pope, councils, the infallible church, tradition which, emanating from Jesus Christ and the apostles, has transmitted itself through the centuries and possesses in the head of the church its inspired organ and permanent interpreter. Such an authority commands obedience; as a real power, it imposes itself upon the intellect and the will, upon the senses and the imagination. In exchange for the submission which it demands, it promises a security which frees the individual from all per-

sonal responsibility and assures to him a convenient tutelage and a constant prop. Do not ask what is the foundation of such authority. "The Roman church is in possession, and, in the last analysis, it has no other titles. While one discusses her rights, she exercises them. To any who demand reasons for her existence she answers by her existence."<sup>1</sup> Protestantism would accomplish its own suicide if it followed the method practiced by Rome. For the exterior rule promulgated by the church it substitutes the spiritual power of the Gospel, that is, of the Word revealing the love of God in Jesus Christ; in the place of the law which regulates and checks, it puts the spirit which inspires and persuades. Thus transformed, authority becomes at once more imperative and more intimate; it is a manifestation of the intrinsic force of truth, a demonstration of the spirit and of power; it is "the conquering shaft which penetrates into the depths of the soul, the sovereign anointing which appeases the agitations and heals the wounds of the heart."<sup>2</sup> Is it not evident that between the spiritual authority thus conceived and the traditional idea of dogma accredited by the Catholic church there is an abyss which nothing can fill?

Let one gather up these briefly indicated

<sup>1</sup> E. SCHÉRER, *op. cit.*, p. 31.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 48-49.

characteristics, let him consider the profound difference which separates the Catholic and the Protestant doctrines of faith, of the church, and of authority in religious matters; he will then recognize that the traditional definition of dogma, an obligatory decree promulgated by an infallible church, is in flagrant contradiction to the essence of Protestantism. If that definition which, without doubt, is derived from history, were to be maintained, if there must be a correct and definite expression of dogma, if it were not permitted to depart from that tradition which the past centuries have left to us, then it would be necessary to conclude that dogma in itself is incompatible with the Protestant principle; it would be necessary to affirm, with Harnack, that the Reformation made an end of dogma.

I have already indicated above<sup>1</sup> that this reasoning seems to me to rest on inadmissible premises. That dogma, in the traditional sense of the term, dogma defined conformably with Catholic principle, may be in flagrant contradiction with the spirit of the Reformation is doubtless true, and on that point history approves Harnack. But are we justified in maintaining that the general idea of dogma and its historical realization are identical; that Protestantism absolutely excludes

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. I, § III.

every other conception of dogma ; that a revision of the traditional idea is impossible ? I think not. On the contrary, it seems to me that in refusing to give a clear and strong expression to its religious faith Protestantism would subscribe to its own death-warrant and hasten its ruin. The inner necessity which constrains it scientifically to formulate its faith does not condemn it to an illusory and impossible task, since it contains within itself all the elements of a renovation of the Catholic idea of dogma.<sup>1</sup> We shall then have to answer a double question : Why may not Protestantism do without dogma ? What is dogma according to the Protestant principle ?

## II.

In insisting upon the necessity of giving to religious life and faith a scientific expression, I do not mean to maintain that each Christian needs, in order to be saved, to know how to give an account of his convictions and be able to formulate clearly his sentiments and beliefs. From the point of view of the individual religious life, this necessity is relative—*necessitas ordinata seu conditionata, non absoluta*, as our early theo-

<sup>1</sup> BOVON: "It is important—lest we fail to do justice to the Reformation in continuing its work—that we abondon completely the idea of official dogma, which is a mere anachronism in our epoch."

logians used to say. That which saves is the grace of God embraced by man's faith, not the knowledge or science of Christian doctrine. Who has not known souls that were penetrated by a living and vigorous piety; hearts overflowing with peace and love; sincere, ardent, devout Christians who might have been very poor theologians, incapable of demonstrating or even understanding the bond which united their religious conceptions, incapable even of expressing in words the inner force from which they drew their courage, their life, and their joy? That inability to reduce to well-ordered theorems the content of their hearts did not affect their piety in the least; it did not check their joy nor diminish their fervor. You have proved the truth of the word of the pious and profound Hamann: "The pearl of Christianity is a life hidden with Christ in God, but that life consists neither in dogmas, nor in rites, nor in formulas."

Again, in order to propagate and communicate itself, it is doubtless necessary that religion should clothe itself in concrete form, that it should transmit itself in concepts and words; but these words and concepts have "value only in so far as they serve as the expression and vehicle of the personal life of the subject. There is the secret and mystery of eloquence. . . . The true religious propaganda is accomplished by moral

contact. *Ex vivo vivus nascitur.*<sup>1</sup> That is why there are, thank God, faithful pastors, convinced preachers, displaying a blessed activity, winning souls to the Gospel, in spite of their very insufficient concepts and all the details of Christian doctrine. The practice of a humble reading of the Holy Scriptures, the knowledge of their own hearts, the treasury of experiences amassed in the course of their ministry, prayer, a full and profound Christian life, give to their testimony an inner force which subjugates wills and wins consciences. "Correctness of theology is of less importance in religion than fervor of piety. Pitiful arguments have produced admirable conversions in all times."<sup>2</sup>

This is not surprising.<sup>3</sup> If Christianity were in essence a theory, if the Word of God had reduced itself to a system of supernatural conceptions, it would be important above all to formulate dogmatically the Christian truth; doctrinal correctness would be the first of all duties, the *sine qua non* of piety, the means *par excellence* of salvation; the intensity of our Christianity would be in direct ratio to the fullness and clearness of our concepts, to the force and virtuosity

<sup>1</sup>SABATIER, *Revue de théologie*, 1893, p. 218; *Revue chrétienne*, II (1893), pp. 396, 397.

<sup>2</sup>SABATIER, *ibid.*, pp. 219, 397.

<sup>3</sup>SCHLEIERMACHER, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 3, no. 4.

of our dialectic; each Christian would have to be, at least in a certain measure, initiated into the problems of theological science; the believer would be duplicated as a dogmatician. We praise God that it is otherwise. His revelation is addressed to the conscience, to the will, to the heart; the certitude which it demands and which it produces is of the moral order, not the scientific. To comprehend and develop a doctrine, the intellect, the memory, facility of exposition and speech, the natural gifts of mind, may suffice; to be a Christian, to have part in the Kingdom of God, one must be born from above, he must be animated by the Holy Spirit, he must belong to Christ. Between these two domains there is an abyss.

No one will accuse me, I think, of overestimating the value of the doctrinal element and exaggerating its importance; dogmatism and intellectualism, fatal to piety, are likewise fatal to Christian theology. But without falling into these errors, one may and ought to affirm that faith needs to give itself clear and faithful expression, exact and complete, in a body of doctrines, in a theological organism, in dogmatics.<sup>1</sup>

| Dogmatics is not for Protestantism an article

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SMITH, "Dogma in Religion" (*Andover Review*, 1891, pp. 491-508).

of luxury which it could do without; far from it: rightly understood, it is a manifestation of the activity of the church, a function of its peculiar life. In scientifically formulating the faith which it lives, the church labors directly in the accomplishment of the work which falls to its domain; the scientific elaboration of its religious convictions is one of the elements of the mission confided to it, with regard to its own members as well as with reference to the world.

In effect, the dogmatic task imposed upon the church has two points of view: On one hand, the church draws from dogmatic science the resources which it needs that it may nourish its intellectual life and solve whatever difficulties may arise within it; on the other hand, it will find there the weapons necessary for opposing the adversaries without, and for exercising its ministry in the world.

We will examine first that which we might call the inner necessity of dogmatic work on the part of the church. The church needs dogma in order to fulfil its vocation with reference to the believers who constitute it.

It would be easy to show, first, that the idea of faith, properly understood, implies, not an exterior and official duty, but rather an immanent obligation to give clear and precise expression to the personal experiences of the Christian con-

sciousness. In religious faith, there is revealed the indissoluble unity of the moral personality, the indestructible solidarity of the faculties of the soul; sentiment, thought, will are the constituent elements of faith, because they are the elements of the personal life. Man, because he is spiritually organized, could not have faith without thinking it under some form. Faith presupposes and implies always an intellectual element which could not exist in a state of pure indetermination, and which necessarily creates for itself a concrete expression. Every attempt to eliminate thought from the religious consciousness of the believer is a psychological impossibility and amounts to a mutilation of the spiritual life.

But we are not treating here the religious life of the individual; rather of the Christian community, the collective life of the church. Now, in order to attain to a knowledge and comprehension of itself, in order to understand the divine riches which have been deposited within it, and to render an account of the faith which is its life, the church cannot dispense with the scientific formulation of the religious convictions which serve as the bond between its members: it is necessary, therefore, that the church should make a system of dogmatics. To neglect or renounce that work, either through indifference

or because of prejudice in favor of some particular system, is to compromise the very life which the church pretends to safeguard; it is an injury to this faith to attempt to maintain it in a state of pure principle, of bare and indetermined religion. Instead of saying: "Christianity is a life, it can accordingly ~~transfer itself~~ into dogma," it is necessary to say: "Because Christianity is a life which began by incarnating itself in a history, we have need of a dogma." Indifference to dogmatics would be, in effect, to refuse to acknowledge, to obscure, or to deprecate the revealed and redemptive facts which form the objective and historical part of the Christian religion. In other words, dogmatic ignorance or hostility toward dogma would lead to a fanciful and cloudy mysticism or to a disintegrating and deadly scepticism. In refusing to express clearly his faith, one would soon come to substitute for distinct and intelligible thoughts either reveries compatible with the states of his soul, perhaps hardly at all Christian, or notions contradictory to the foundations of Christianity. To conserve healthy and intact the life which courses in its veins, to assure the normal functioning of that life, to permit it to renew itself at the sources which nourish it, to recall constantly to evangelical faith the fact that it draws its content, its inner life, and its force from the Gospel—that is

to say, from a fact at once both human and divine, from a Person who dominates history and who ought to transform our history—in short, to live, to grow, and develop itself, the church needs to think its life and speak its thought, to express it, not only in prayers, songs, and preaching, but again, and above all, in doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Indispensable to the life, to the health, to the spiritual belief of the church, doctrine is also necessary to it for the communication of the verity which it professes. I retract nothing of what I said above concerning religious propaganda which takes place by moral contact; nevertheless, to spread and prolong itself through the centuries, that propaganda implies and demands instruments and vehicles. It is theological thought which furnishes these vehicles and instruments to religious sentiment. The purest and most elevated sentiment runs the risk of being corrupted or dissipated. By fixing itself in a dogmatic formula it is exposed, no doubt, to the danger of becoming rigid or petrified, but it will regain life as soon as it comes, through these

<sup>1</sup> "Dogma is a *necessary product* of the life created by the Gospel" (Bovon). "To Christians, engaged as we are in an immense crisis whose compass it would be puerile to wish to limit, the conscientious revision of the foundations of faith is not a digression calculated to procure for us an intellectual pastime: *it is a moral necessity*" (*Revue théologique de Montauban*, 1875-76, p. 201).

tutelary vehicles, into contact with consciences and hearts.<sup>1</sup> Nay, that new birth itself is possible only where the primitive Christian experience has been passed on by the help of authentic means which serve at the same time to interpret and to transmit it. To propagate religion, it is necessary that souls should not only be ardent, but that they should also be luminous.

What must we conclude? This, that the practical activity of the pastor will be enriched, will gain in breadth, in depth, in solidity, if it remains in touch with the scientific work of the church, of which dogma is one of the most precious fruits. Preaching and catechetical teaching will be, in general, more varied and fruitful with the minister who possesses a serious theological culture than with a pastor deprived of dogmatic instruction. The more the preacher gives an intellectual account of his faith, the more he examines the dogmas of his church, so much the more will he approach being practical and religious in his pulpit or in the presence of youth, where it is necessary to instruct. Careful to draw the line between theological formula and the Christian substance of doctrines, he will be the more capable of retaining and showing to best

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER, *De la vie intime des dogmes*, p. 7: "The intellectual notion, expressing itself with the help of imagination, can serve to renew or fortify an emotion, and dogma can awaken piety."

advantage the primitive and permanent religious essentials, accommodating them to the spiritual needs of his hearers and to the infinitely varied exigencies of his time. On the other hand, the pastor who has neglected to submit his piety to a strong intellectual discipline will be exposed to two dangers: either his preaching and teaching will be the monotonous expression of his subjective religiousness and his individual piety, or he will be satisfied with the external and routine usage of traditional formulas of which he will not know how to penetrate the meaning or ~~explore~~<sup>make use of</sup> the riches. Let us not fear, then, that dogmatics will harm the sermon, the catechism, or missionary activity among pagan populations; undigested dogmatism in preaching is almost always a direct proof of the dogmatic insufficiency of the preacher.

Finally, a last service which the church renders to itself, in attempting to formulate scientifically its religious faith, is the appeasing of confessional and ecclesiastical contentions, the bringing together of different parties, not by equivocal and unnatural compromises, but by loyal and fruitful discussions. All progress in theological studies is progress in the cause of conciliation. Conscientious and disinterested researches after the truth establish between sincere spirits, of whatever denomination, a strong and intimate

bond, a communion which will not be slow to reveal itself to those without and to manifest itself in the life of the church. Exact and scrupulous examination into the inner life of dogmas, into their genesis and their historical evolution, always facilitates the clear distinction between the transient shell of doctrines and their religious kernel, which it is not permitted to sacrifice. In separating carefully the problems which interest only the school from the truths which are of direct importance to the church, in pointing out the profound difference, and yet the necessary solidarity, which maintains between religion and theology, dogmatic science performs a work of peace, a task sincerely and sacredly evangelical.

To give a passing thought to the foregoing considerations is sufficient to convince one that orthodoxy is correct in that it affirms, as against all forms of mysticism and rationalism, the necessity of a doctrinal expression of Christianity, the necessity of dogma. To condemn in principle or to neglect in practice the constitution of a religious doctrine is, for the church, to refuse to do its duty with regard to its own members; it is a traitorous betrayal of its own cause.

That would also be to capitulate to her enemies and to deliver to them, with her ensign, the living forces which have brought her

to life and nourished her. To resist her enemies without, and to accomplish her historical mission and religious ministry, Protestantism is compelled to elaborate a system of doctrines. This is the apologetical and polemical value of dogma. Protestant dogmatics, it is true, does not propose merely to give a scientific exposition of the Protestant faith; it addresses itself to believers, and works in the service of the church; it has not for its direct object a polemic justification of its principle as against those who are strangers to its faith, or a systematic refutation of the doctrines which are contrary to it. But, in the measure in which dogmatic science shall succeed in bringing to organic and living unity the religious testimony of the Protestant consciousness, it will furnish to the apologetics of the evangelical faith a valuable defense and a positive contribution.

However, this task will always devolve upon those who do not intend to break with Christianity, but who, on the contrary, try to represent its true principle and remain faithful to the spirit of Christ and to the teaching of the apostles. In the contest with the Catholic church and with the sects issuing out of Protestantism, our churches will not advance with any chance of success unless they succeed in clearly formulating their faith, as they established it in the sixteenth

century, in justifying it by a sane and scrupulous exegesis, and in proving it on the testimony of history. By taking possession, scientifically, of the spiritual treasure bequeathed to us by our fathers, by transforming that religious heritage into an expression appropriate to our own epoch, by elaborating concise and vigorous formulas that will give expression to the religious content of our Protestant consciousness, we shall provide ourselves at once with both compass and ballast in the midst of the current opinions which traverse, wave-like, our times, and whose impact we feel to the very center of our churches. We shall be ~~Secured against~~ exposed to thoughtless fads and mortal fears. A startling manifestation of the religious life or a novel form of theological thought will not suffice to overcome the trouble and disorder in the churches and in the hearts of believers ; religious tact, the fruit of Christian experience, will be rendered keener by intellectual discernment, the fruit of theological culture ; dogmatics will come out of faith itself, and faith will clarify itself in the school of dogmatics.

It is no presumption to think that upon the points established in the foregoing pages all Protestant theologians are agreed. If, indeed, voices have been raised against dogma, if some have sought to maintain that the sixteenth century made an end of Christian dogmatics, if

some have demanded, not a recasting of the old Gospel, but a revision of traditional dogmatics, still no one has gone so far as to maintain that Protestantism can dispense with giving its faith a clear and precise expression. The attacks which we have witnessed have been aimed either at the pretension of a church to promulgate an immutable dogmatic formulary or at the reign of an unyielding and intolerant dogmatism. But in the very camp of those who repudiated the errors of a past too greatly dominated by Catholic tradition, no one has ever wished to resolve evangelical faith into confused and indiscernible emotions; no one has tried to renounce the translation of that faith into distinct thoughts and clear and forcible words. Such is notably the point of view of the French theologians who, rightly or wrongly, have been christened by the name of the "New School;" they resent the fiction of a religion in a pure and indeterminate state. "It is perfectly irrational," says Sabatier, "to talk of a religion without dogma and without cult. . . . Moreover, it is not ridiculous to believe the hero of the novel who said he could not think without talking, for everybody is that hero."<sup>1</sup>

### III.

More than one reader will doubtless judge that the foregoing arguments have advanced us

<sup>1</sup> *De la vie intime des dogmes*, pp. 9, 10.

but little, and that the results attained are not proportionate to the effort put forth. Indeed, the results have, at first sight, a critical and negative import; but their positive value, though indirect, is not less real. From the given data it is easy to conclude in what sense and under what conditions the idea of dogma is compatible with the religious principle of Protestantism.

From the point of view of the Protestant it is necessary to condemn every conception which makes of dogma an authoritative and obligatory decision of the church in the sense of a statutory and legal ordinance. The original fault of this conception, legalism, has been conquered in principle by the evangelical idea of inner and personal faith. Whether one reveres dogma as an integral part of a cult, as an element of the liturgy and the priestly mysteries,<sup>1</sup> or whether one submits himself to it as an article of a constitution promulgated and applied by the hierarchy,<sup>2</sup> it matters little; under either form the Catholic idea of dogma is opposed to the very essence of Protestantism. It is not in the name of reason, or of criticism, or of science, but in the name of the religious faith of the Protestant church, that we repudiate a dogmatism which, ab-

<sup>1</sup> The valuation which rules in the Greek Catholic church.

<sup>2</sup> The point of view familiar to the Roman Catholic church.

solute in theory, leads in practical reality into scepticism and to indifference to all doctrinal exposition of the faith. On the other hand, we take our stand not the less vigorously against the pretended inutility of dogmatic formulas; we reject as illusory and fatal the principles and methods of those who would retain the spirit of religion without giving it a body in a doctrinal organism.

In attempting to determine the rôle of dogma in the Protestant church, we shall not waste discussion on words, on the legitimacy or inopportuneness of the term "dogma," or on the distinction which should be made between dogma and doctrine. What are of importance here are the ideas and facts which it is necessary to establish and defend.

(a) It is necessary that Protestant dogma should be the expression of the Protestant faith. Its exclusive mission consists in serving as the faithful organ, as the scrupulous and complete interpreter, of the religious experience and consciousness, of which the Gospel is at the same time the principle and the object. That is equivalent to saying that the material for dogma is furnished by religion which traces the limits for it and marks out its tasks. The sphere in which dogma centers is the religious sphere. It has nothing to do with the problems of pure

metaphysics, with the physical and natural sciences, or with historical and philological ~~history~~<sup>critic</sup>. The nearer dogma comes to being the clear and luminous expression of pure evangelical faith, the nearer does it approach to its ideal. In the measure in which, instead of revealing and translating faith, it obscures or mutilates it, it is unfaithful to its task and betrays its true nature. In their formation and development the dogmas of different churches have become in time charged with elements foreign to faith; in the primary stages of development the majority of these elements were the necessary vehicles of Christian piety and convictions. But the primitive harmony existing between the containing vessel and its contents, between religious faith and dogmatic formula, is broken, and the official dogma conceals today materials which, far from serving as faithful exponents of the Christian consciousness, have come to be its obstacles and fetters. What, in such a case, will be the rôle of Protestant dogma? Allowing the antiquated forms to fall away, it must become again the living interpreter of faith and recover the original accord which maintained between the Christian principle and its theological vehicle.

(b) It is necessary that Protestant dogma should be the scientific expression of the Protes-

tant faith. Dogma is the language which faith speaks, but dogmatic language assumes another form and proceeds otherwise than the expression of piety in preaching, in catechetical instruction, in prayer and chants. Clearness, precision, the logical bond of thoughts, absence of all obscurity and all equivocation in ideas or terms, are the fundamental qualities which we rightfully demand of every dogmatic formula destined to translate the Protestant faith. These qualities are not a purely scientific or literary order; they have their origin in ethics; they are a particular form of probity and integrity. Nothing is more fatal than a dogmatic formula which conceals difficulties, instead of seeking to solve them, or which hides the truth while it endeavors to express it. Without exaggerating the importance of theological work, it is possible to maintain that the invention of a timely formula, of a term at once plastic and comprehensive, is a precious service which science can render to piety and to the church. There are such expressions, serving as summaries, in which, under tangible and workable form, faith has deposited the substance of moral experiences and religious revelations. Aptitude for discovering these strong and significant expressions, virtuosity in conceiving these abbreviatory formulas which are the concentrated essence of a mass of observations or analyses, is

one of the distinctive marks of the true theologian. In our century no one has invented so many such expressions as Schleiermacher; he put into scientific circulation a great number of singularly rich and vigorous terms, luminous and striking definitions, algebraic notations representing the important phenomena or groups of phenomena from which the author was able to disengage the persistent character and the general law. The more the dogmatist approaches clearness and sharpness of definition in these infinitely delicate operations, the more real and durable is the scientific value of his formulas.

If one seriously accepts the scientific character of dogma, he will not be tempted to speak of biblical dogmas or revealed dogmas. Is revelation a scientific function? Ought it to be substituted for the work of reflection or the operations of the intellect? Does it consist of a communication of abstract notions or theological formulas? Do our biblical documents pretend to be scientific manuals? Are they distinguished by their systematic rigor and perfection? To all these questions one can give only a negative answer. Then let us cease to degrade the nature of revelation or the Scriptures by seeking there what they will not give to us, that is, a scientific formula for the truths which they proclaim. Let us discard also those forms of expression which

can only obscure a question in itself perfectly clear. Let us not admit the fiction of "implicit dogmas, not theologically formulated;" let us reserve and limit the term to the scientific, hence human, expression of religious faith, the fruit of divine revelation; let us know how to distinguish between redemptive facts, the creative work of God, and theological formulas, the product of human reflection; the former are the generative principles and objects of faith, the latter only should be applied to dogmas.

(c) It is necessary that Protestant dogma should be a scientific affirmation of the faith of the church, not the individual opinion of a teacher or the particular system of a school. Though Protestantism has broken with the Catholic notion of the church and authority, still it has not wished to put subjective arbitrariness in the place of an exterior code promulgated by an infallible power.<sup>1</sup> The Protestant church, to be sure, recognizes an authority to which it submits itself and upon which it bases its testimony. The debate between Rome and Wittenberg or Geneva extends only to the nature and foundation of religious authority. That authority, of an entirely spiritual character, is the Gospel, the revela-

<sup>1</sup>BOVON: "Dogma is not the product of subjective, personal reflection; it aspires to hold that which is held in common by the experiences created by the Gospel; this gives to it its force and its general character of authority."

tion of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

(d) It is necessary that dogma, the scientific expression of the faith of the church, shall respond to the needs and interests of the present epoch and generation. The Protestant dogma which we need should not be the mere inventory of a past more or less distant; a scientific exposition of dogmas will never be resigned to an absorption or loss of itself in a history of dogmas or in symbolism.<sup>2</sup> Dogma, to correspond to its aim, should be living, that is, it should faithfully represent the degree of spiritual comprehension of the Gospel to which the church of our day is raised. How can this necessity be reconciled with the law that we have just announced? Where may be found the formula that will gather up in its entirety the Protestant faith of our epoch and correspond to the spiritual temper of our Christian consciousness? There, if I mistake not, is the vital problem of Protestant dogmatics. The theologian who is faithful to the

<sup>1</sup> See Chaps. IV and V of this work.

<sup>2</sup> The most resolute defenders of ancient dogma concede this. The necessity of taking account of the religious needs and interests of the present generation would in itself be sufficient reason for excluding the range of Protestant dogmatics from the historical sciences, as Schleiermacher wished; but in other respects he did not abide entirely faithful to this point of view. See *Der christliche Glaube*, § 19, 3; § 25.

principle of the Reformation refuses to see in our own times the norm of religious truth, and yet he does not wish to withdraw himself from his environment or isolate himself from his contemporaries; he finds the measure and type of Christian truth in the Gospel, but he wishes that this Gospel might speak a language accessible to our generation. He does not despair of success in such an enterprise, for he knows that the evangelical revelation is inexhaustibly rich, resistant enough to furnish a fixed and immovable point in the midst of the constant evolution of dogmatic theories, pliable enough to adapt itself to the most varied degrees of civilization and culture.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not difficult to answer the question so actively debated today: "Do we need a new dogma?" Those who identify the religious substance of the Christian verity with its intellectual and scientific expression will resent that question as folly and blasphemy; those who see in dogma only the scientific formula of faith will judge that the problem thus stated outlines

<sup>1</sup> We will review this subject in the treatment of authority in religious matters and of the norm of Protestant dogmatics. The fixed point of dogmatics has been emphasized with great vigor in the inaugural discourse of Haering, May 2, 1895; he has shown that the Christian faith must not sacrifice to the relativism of contemporary science its claim to the possession of absolute religious verity in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (see *Die Lebensfrage der systematischen Theologie, die Lebensfrage des christlichen Glaubens*, Tübingen, 1895).

precisely the task which devolves upon Protestant dogmatics.<sup>1</sup> Today every dogmatician who is ambitious to serve his church and assist in translating into living and fruitful doctrines the eternal realities of the Gospel of Christ sets himself to this task.

It is therefore our task to set forth the conclusions of our researches upon dogma and apply these to Protestant dogmatics.

<sup>1</sup> Such is the position of Kaftan. It seems to me that certain of his adversaries are nearer to his position than they think.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ACTUAL TASK OF PROTESTANT DOGMATICS.

*I. The necessary correlation between the notion of dogma and the idea of a dogmatic discipline.*—The task of dogmatics in the Roman church.—The task of dogmatics according to the scholastic teachers of Protestant orthodoxy.—The task of dogmatics according to the religious principle of the Reformation consists in the systematic exposition of faith, of which the Gospel is both source and object.

*II. Protestant dogmatics and the Christian faith.*—Their relation to each other.—The solution implied in the theology of the Reformers and resumed by Schleiermacher; the necessity of fulfilling that program.—The importance and dignity which dogmatics has acquired in the Protestant church.

*III. The scientific independence and practical aim of Protestant dogmatics.* The apparent antinomy which this problem involves.—Dogmatics is legitimate as a science, not in transforming the practical function of religious apprehension into objective and theoretical knowledge, but in conforming rigorously to the immanent laws of its own object, which is the Christian faith.—Dogmatics contributes to the edification of the church, not by submitting itself as a *credo* imposed by an external and legal authority, but by expressing scientifically the religious content of the Christian consciousness, the child of the Gospel. The close and necessary correlation between the scientific rôle and the ecclesiastical task of Protestant dogmatics.

### I.

LIKE dogma, like dogmatics. There obtains between the notion of dogma and the rôle of dogmatics a necessary and direct relation.

The method practiced and consecrated by

Catholic theology corresponds to the traditional idea of dogma. If dogma is the statutory decision of an infallible authority, if the theologian receives from the hands of the church revealed doctrines to which his intelligence can only submit itself, then "the task of dogmatics is at bottom very simple. Its whole aim and effort will be to arrange these dogmas in a logical order so as to make a system, and, so far as is possible, to prove them by the aid of reason and the syllogism."<sup>1</sup> Although the great scholastic teachers did not all hold an identical opinion as to the relation between reason and the ecclesiastical dogma, still their method did not essentially differ. The work of the (Catholic) dogmatist is almost exclusively a formal one, in which there sometimes appears the encyclopedic spirit of learning which compiles authorities; sometimes the logical virtuosity of the dialectician which accumulates divisions, definitions, difficulties, and attempts at solution; sometimes the synthetic talent of the organizer which endeavors to construct a system more artificial than solid.

From the great Catholic teachers of the mediæval period to the Protestant dogmatists of the orthodox period the transition is easy, and one perceives with difficulty any change in

<sup>1</sup>SABATIER, *De la vie intime des dogmes*, p. 23.

epoch and church. The reason is that those who represented the orthodoxy succeeding the creative period of the Reformation did not break with the principle of an infallible exterior rule. Unfaithful to the primitive inspiration of Protestantism, they returned to the idea of legal and statutory authority, and they made this the basis of their conception of dogma ; but for the authority of popes and councils they substituted that of the Holy Scripture and symbolic books. Instead of drawing dogmas ready made and perfect out of the tradition of the church, they drew them from the Bible, expounded in the light of the confessions of faith. But in either case the dogmatic work is the same. The task is to group systematically the doctrines imposed by scriptural or ecclesiastical authority, to find divisions and subdivisions, to formulate definitions, to accumulate *dicta probantia* in order to bolster up traditional dogmas, and to turn against papist or other adversaries the arms of an implacable polemic. The points of resemblance between the systems of our ancient dogmaticians and the *summa* of the great scholastics of the Middle Ages are as numerous as they are characteristic : abstract form of development, abuse of reason, triumph of the syllogism, sagacity and subtlety, erudition and narrowness, minute expositions, harshness in controversy, servile submission to

the letter of the biblical canon or ecclesiastical creeds. Thus the task of the Protestant dogmatist differed from that of the Catholic savant only in the material upon which he exercised his talent and his purely formal method.

It is clear that a return to the vital principle of the Reformation and the corresponding transformation of the idea of dogma in the evangelical church involves a parallel modification of the task intrusted to the dogmatist. Dogmatics is no longer for us a more or less skilfully prepared inventory of the *loci classici* of Holy Scripture or of the doctrinal decisions of our creeds. It is the scientific exposition of the Protestant faith. From the inner and personal character of that faith flows a conception of dogmatics very different from that of traditional orthodoxy, but in harmony with the generative and inspiring spirit of Protestant piety.

## II.

If Protestant dogmatics is the systematic exposition of the Protestant faith, it follows that it has its roots and *raison d'être* only in faith; it must translate with fidelity the affirmations and follow rigorously the guidance of faith; it must accept the inspiration and safeguard the postu-

<sup>1</sup>Astie, commenting on Harnack, says: "A new dogmatic development can come only after a profound and intense religious movement."

lates of faith. Dogmatics creates nothing ; it merely formulates the problems whose elements are given to it by the religious experience of the Christian in the presence of the living realities of the Gospel. Dogmatics is an experimental and positive science, but it receives its material from faith ; rather, its material is faith itself with the divine content of faith, that is, the Gospel. In determining thus the object and limits of Protestant dogmatics, we are only following and applying the program marked out by our Reformers and gloriously resumed by Schleiermacher.

Without doubt Luther and his great co-laborers did not formulate a theory of religious knowledge, nor did they anywhere sketch a dogmatic program ; but they did better. In renewing the notion of faith, in reviving the inner and personal character of the religion of the Gospel, they traced for Protestant theology a way whither it must proceed without wavering, under the penalty of decaying and becoming a poor caricature of Catholicism. Their reaction against the tyranny of Scholasticism, the effort they put forth to free evangelical faith from the Roman tradition and from the authority of mediæval Aristotelianism, the sovereign importance which they accorded to the Word of God, the principle and object of faith, have prepared the emancipation of Protestant dogmatics. For the energy with which Schleier-

macher has claimed for the Christian consciousness "an independent province," and has conferred upon piety the religious primacy in opposition to formal dogmatics, for the vigor of his protest against the enslaving of faith by the yoke of powers foreign or hostile to religion, he deserves to be called the continuer of the theological work of the Reformation. Unhappily the appellation does not correspond, in Schleiermacher, to the perspicuity and power of his declaration of the rights of Protestant dogmatics. The classical work of the great theologian is not, to tell the truth, a systematic exposition of the Protestant faith ; it is composed of reflections upon the soul of the Christian, upon the different modifications of the religious consciousness of the subject. The bond which, in theory, Schleiermacher established between faith and dogmatics was thus broken ; the latter was no longer the direct expression of the former. Between faith and the formula of faith there were interposed factors which were not drawn from the inner life of religion, but which the author borrowed from his philosophical determinism.<sup>1</sup> One should try seriously to apprehend Schleiermacher's undertaking and put into practice the postulates which he established with irrefutable eloquence.

<sup>1</sup> BONIFAS, "La principe théologique de Schleiermacher," *Revue théologique de Montauban*, 1870, p. 264.

It is thus in the fact of Christian faith born of the Gospel that we shall find the living unity of Protestant dogmatics, the generative and organizing principle of the system. Without dwelling here upon considerations which we shall take up elsewhere, it is important to bear in mind continually that dogmatics cannot be an aggregation of dogmas originally isolated and afterward grouped together by the dogmatician. Far from that; as the Christian faith is unitary in principle, in spite of the infinite variety of its aspects and manifestations, so dogmatics must form a harmonious organism, a complete and living whole. The dogmatician who does not aspire to a view of the field as a whole, to an organic conception of the Christian faith, has not rightly apprehended his task and is below the level which the church expects him to attain. The unity of which we speak is far different from that which ruled in the laborious and artificial constructions of our early theologians; it is the flowering forth of a vital principle antecedent to all work of systematization; it is "faith giving birth to the science of faith."

Between these two—between personal and living faith and dogmatic science—the relation is direct and constant. Hence the importance and dignity which dogmatics acquires in the Protestant church. A glance at Catholicism in this

regard is very instructive. I have tried to show above<sup>1</sup> that, notwithstanding the authoritative and obligatory character of its revealed and divine dogmas, the Roman church favors, in practice, indifference and ignorance in dogmatic matters. Hence the work of the dogmatician lies outside of the great course of the life of the church; he necessarily has no hold upon the spirits of men, because dogma, like faith, has no essential relation to the inner life, to the religious development, to the piety of believers. Let the theologian amass and arrange the parts of his system; the laity does not care. It submits *in toto* to the decrees of sovereign authority; that suffices and ought to suffice for it. Not so with Protestants. If it is true that dogmatics is only the translation of the experiences of the Christian consciousness into scientific language, if it ought to spring from the depths of our religious life, then every obstacle between piety and theology is condemnable. At the point where it originates it betrays a hidden error. Either dogmatics, instead of drawing from the source of living faith, goes astray in empty and sterile abstractions, or piety, ceasing to abide in touch with the thought of its times, degenerates into narrow and sickly pietism. Thus there must be between the new life, illumined by the Gospel,

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. II, § I.

and dogmatic science, elaborating the formulas of faith, a union, even a real and constant collaboration.

### III.

In fulfilling this condition, dogmatics will reach the solution of a problem which, at first view, presents serious difficulties and might even appear insoluble. On one hand, it means to be a true science, an independent science; on the other hand, it would work efficiently in the service of the church.

In affirming that Protestant dogmatics is a science, we do not mean to say that it must possess merely the formal attributes of scientific exposition. Perspicuity of development, precision in definitions, simplicity and rigor in arrangement, do not suffice to constitute a science worthy of the name; certainly none of these qualities could assure the freedom of science.

Where, then, shall we find the guaranty of independence which alone attests the dignity of dogmatic science?

One sometimes seeks to secure for himself this necessary liberty by the help of illusory and dangerous means. It is imagined that, by effacing the line of demarkation which distinguishes religious knowledge from scientific knowledge, one might succeed in raising dogmatics to the height of a true science. "Let religious truth do

away with its personal and subjective character; let it transform itself into objective and impersonal idea; let it resign itself to being a purely practical manifestation of the spiritual life; let it have the ambition and the courage to fix itself in theoretical function; let it translate itself into logical and metaphysical theses of universal and indisputable import. Only under this condition can Protestant dogmatics pretend to be a science." Such is the program of orthodoxy of which contemporary speculative theology is, on this point, the faithful and convinced ally.<sup>1</sup>

It is nevertheless true that those who give such counsels to Protestant dogmatics are its worst enemies; without willing to do so, they undermine its foundation and work towards its destruction.

In effect, the proper subject-matter of dogmatics does not appertain to the sphere of theoretical and objective knowledge. That subject-matter is Christian faith, an eminently personal act, a determination of the will and the conscience,

<sup>1</sup> To characterize the contemporary German theological speculation, it suffices to cite the names of the two theologians most noted in the speculative school, Biedermann and Pfleiderer. Nothing is more instructive, in this regard, than a comparison of the three editions of the *Dogmatics* of LIPSIUS (1876, 1879, 1894). One can follow here the strong and sincere effort of the author, who separated himself with increasing vigor and clearness from the tyranny of speculative thought, according to which dogmatics is a religious metaphysic.

an inner affirmation provoked by a divine fact, by a superior revelation, by the gift of the love of God demanding the gift of the heart of man. This inner drama of the spirit will never be able to resolve itself into a dialectic process or into a problem accessible to theoretical reason; it is a work of divine grace constraining and freeing the human will; it is an experience which sinks into the depths of the moral life and takes place only by the help of all the energies of the soul. To fail to recognize this subjective and practical character of Christian piety, to eliminate faith from the active and spontaneous life, to lift it into I know not what objective and theoretical region, in order to assure the independence of the science of faith—that is to undertake a fatal and deceptive task; it is to dissolve the Christian verity into a poor residue of speculative abstractions; it is to kill the religion in Christianity.

Some other way must be attempted, and, after what we have thus far established, the procedure should not be doubtful. How can dogmatics establish its right as a science? By conforming to the laws which are derived from the very nature of its object; by conforming rigorously to the conditions and to the character of its own material; by confining itself within the limits traced for it by the data upon which dogmatics rests. Now, that material, that object, is the

Christian faith; these data the Gospel furnishes to faith. If dogmatics is the submissive interpreter of the Christian faith, it will share in the independence which characterizes its principle, because the Christian faith is a spiritual reality which, born of the Gospel, does not depend upon the forum of natural reason, nor does it come within the jurisdiction of the empirical and phenomenal domain. Just as æsthetics is constituted a science by the sole fact that it deduces the immanent laws of the beautiful and strives to express these in clear and precise words, so dogmatics responds to its scientific mission by faithfully reproducing and connecting with rigor the immediate affirmations of the Christian consciousness. It does not need, therefore, to ask for scientific investiture from powers foreign to faith; faith it is, which, giving to dogmatics its reason for existence, confers upon it its titles of nobility. To deny the scientific character of Protestant dogmatics would be to deny the fact of Christian piety and the very existence of evangelical faith.<sup>1</sup>

But is not this scientific independence of Protestant dogmatics a compromise with the duty incumbent on theology of contributing to the

<sup>1</sup> Thus we cannot subscribe to the judgment of H. Bois: "Theology (systematic, dogmatic) is not a science."—*Le dogme grec*, p. 267.

edification of the church? How is the autonomy of theological science to be reconciled with its mission of working for the greatest good of a confession or a religious society? Does not the service exacted of this science constitute a slavery unworthy of it?

By no means. If dogmatics does the work of a science in interpreting faithfully and clearly the Christian consciousness of the church, is it not evident that, in just that measure, it accomplishes a task directly useful to the church? To expound with scrupulous care the Christian experiences which characterize Protestantism, to translate these experiences into clear and precise language, to point out their creative principle, their permanent inspiration, their organic and living bond, such is the scientific task of Protestant dogmatics, such is likewise the theological and ecclesiastical mission of that discipline. There is no dualism, no conflict, between these two functions. Dogmatics finds its center of gravity and base of operation in the spiritual realities which are the very life of the Christian community; it is the intellectual organ and scientific interpreter of this life; it draws unceasingly from this inexhaustible source the material of its work; it returns to believers under reflective and reasoned form the sentiments and thoughts which it receives in a primitive and confused state, obscure and fragmentary; it ex-

presses and develops the content of the religious consciousness of the church; it translates the Christian life into theological thought; from the fervor of faith it causes to spring forth the light of knowledge.

This close relationship and spiritual collaboration do not profit the church alone; they react also upon dogmatic science, and bring to it a valuable and constant assistance; there is an exchange and reciprocity of services and offices. The ever-present thought of its mission to the Christian community keeps dogmatics from isolating itself from the practical interests of the religious consciousness; it does not permit it to intrench itself in abstract spheres of pure speculation; it reminds dogmatics ever that it is the servant of faith, and that any theological formula which is not the expression of that faith has no right to existence in the doctrinal system of Protestantism.

The solidarity which maintains between dogmatic science and the church should not, however, be understood in the superficial sense which Catholicism often attaches to it, and which sometimes appears in our evangelical communities. No official church is qualified to impose upon Protestant theology a dogmatic *credo* and prescribe for it "that which it is necessary to believe;" on the other hand, it is not the mission

of dogmatics to furnish to the preacher or teacher the direct subject-matter for sermon or teaching. It is not in this exterior and mechanical fashion that the relationship between the dogmatic activity of the theologian and the practical ministry of the pastor should be comprehended. Such a relationship would degrade the dignity of the science and pervert the vocation of the church; it would change dogmatics into a technical and empirical training, deprived of all high inspiration and ideal value; it would make of the church a judicial corporation or administrative machine, imposing upon thought the yoke of a vexing and degrading code; it would deny the essential character of Protestantism and betray the religious principle of the Gospel.

It is necessary that the alliance between these two friendly powers should rest, not on an external compromise, but upon the immanent law of theology and of the church; that is, upon inner and personal faith, which is at once the soul of the Christian community and the object of Protestant dogmatics.

We have thus the materials for our point of departure, for the invariable theme of our researches and our exposition: faith giving birth to the science of faith. The inner necessity which brings us constantly into the presence of this capital subject imposes on us all the more im-

periously the duty of discussing the problem which has many times solicited our consideration: What are the source and the norm of Protestant dogmatics?

We shall try to answer this question.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SOURCE OF PROTESTANT DOGMATICS.

*I. Evangelical faith the source of Protestant dogmatics.*—Necessity of interpreting this formula.—The experimental and personal character of faith and of Protestant theology.—The Reformers.—Pietism.—Schleiermacher: fruitfulness of the theological principle which he drew from the premises of the Reformation; breaks in this principle.

*II. Is the religious experience of the Christian the source of Protestant dogmatics?*—The narrowness and weakness of that theological position.—Dangers and illusions to which theologians of subjective experience expose themselves.—The part which they assign to the Holy Scripture and to ecclesiastical tradition: accommodations and compromises.—Inadequacy of this point of view.

*III. Attempt at a solution of the problem.*—The question of the source of dogmatics is the same as that of the source of faith.—The Gospel the source of Protestant faith; the meaning and extent of this formula.—Criticism of the point of view of Schleiermacher.—The Gospel and the Christian consciousness.—Agreement of this solution with the religious principle of the Reformation.—The necessity of completing the study of the source of dogmatics by an examination of the norm of dogmatics.

### I.

AFTER the preceding researches, the solution of the much discussed problem of the source of Protestant dogmatics will no longer seem impossible.

If dogmatics is the science of faith, it must be concluded that the object of that science is

also its source: the source of dogmatics is faith.

Since that proposition is capable of various interpretations, it is important to determine clearly its meaning.

To declare that evangelical faith is the source of Protestant dogmatics is to announce a judgment which immediately raises a new problem: Where will the dogmatist find the constitutive elements, and, if I dare so to designate it, the original material or living substance of that faith whose scientific expression he undertakes to formulate?

Is it in the personal consciousness of the theologian? Many authors have so judged, and in a certain sense it is true to say that the living faith discloses itself precisely in the believing subject, in the individual Christian. If the motto of the dogmatist should be the celebrated word of Anselm, *Credo ut intelligam*, is not his task, then, to comprehend, to analyze, to express his own inner experiences as a Christian, to translate into scientific formulas the spiritual realities which determine and constitute his inner life, to transform into reflective and precise concepts the immediate affirmations of his own piety?

That conception seems the more plausible because it can appeal to a series of declarations

borrowed from our Reformers. What is, in a word, according to the spiritual fathers of our church, the spirit of the Christian religion ? It is the personal experience of salvation, the immovable certitude of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the individual assurance of pardon and of the divine life, the communion of the justified and regenerated soul with the heavenly Father who has given himself to us in his only Son.

Must we quote texts and recall clear and decisive testimony on this point ? Luther does not weary of repeating that it is faith that makes one a Christian, and that theology has only the other part of teaching what faith produces by help of the Word of God. Where, again, does Melanchthon find the peculiar object of theological elaboration, if not in the practical and experimental knowledge of the benefits of Christ ? How often do Zwingli and Calvin appeal to the experience of the believer, to the *mens christiana* which Calvin opposed to the *sensus carnis* and which he made the attribute of belief and the necessary organ of Christian knowledge ! So true is it that the emancipation of the religious consciousness should involve a radical revolution in the domain of dogmatic theology !

This impulse, once given, was continued by Pietism. In spite of the profound differences which

separate it from our Reformers, in spite of the leaven of monastic Catholicism which mingled with its moral and religious life, Pietism has, in a word, renewed and re-established in the light some of the great spiritual affirmations of Luther and Calvin, affirmations which were the fruitful germs of a new dogmatics. In the famous controversies which, on several occasions, were raised between the Pietists and orthodoxy, Spener and his friends took their position as defenders of a point of view which, notwithstanding all manner of imprudence, misunderstandings, and confusion, corresponds to some of the masterful ideas of our Reformers. "It is necessary to be a Christian in order to be a theologian; one must live the life of faith to be capable of constructing a science of faith." These theses of the Pietists are in absolute contrast to the theories of their orthodox adversaries who see in theology a severely objective science, whose mission consists in expounding and demonstrating the articles of faith of the traditional creed.

Evangelical individualism, at the same time vigorous and inconsistent in our Reformers, wavering or excessive in the Pietists and their more radical successors, concealed within itself a new theology which neither Luther nor Spener had undertaken to set forth or scientifically formulate. That work of renovation was attempted by

Schleiermacher. He drew from the religious premises of the Reformation a theological principle, a dogmatic canon. "One is a member of the Christian community only by faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior." "To enter into communion with Christ is to live in a new relationship with God, that is, it is to be justified, and, for that very reason, it is to change the manner of one's life, that is to say, it is to be converted."<sup>1</sup> This new life is at once the actual foundation and logical *prius* of the Christian Science; the experience of communion with God in Jesus Christ is the root from whence springs dogmatic theology.

In announcing these axioms and placing them at the foundation of his religious and dialectic masterpiece, Schleiermacher brought into full light the eminently personal character of Protestant faith. On this premise his theological principle flows directly from the original and authentic inspiration of the Reformation, and it abides constant in Protestant dogmatics. No evangelical conviction truly worthy of the name could be the mere repetition of a testimony foreign to our own spiritual life; it is an affirmation of the religious consciousness, an inner decision of the Christian subject, the fruit of a spiritual certitude, an "asset of self to self," an act of confidence pro-

<sup>1</sup>SCHLEIERMACHER, *Der christliche Glaube*, §§ 14, 107.

voked and incessantly maintained in the soul by a factor imposing itself upon us with an evidence as spiritual as it is imperious.

This principle, of marvelous fruitfulness, has been the powerful ferment which broke the molds of orthodox and critical intellectualism and also caused the inert leaven of an antiquated supernaturalism and a rationalism without depth or religious savor to become active. It is because he discovered these truths—attained by the Reformation, but too often unrecognized and afterward forgotten altogether—that Schleiermacher has led the theological movement of our century and has left upon the field of Protestant thought his ineffaceable stamp. In France, Vinet agrees on this point with the renovator of German theology, but his influence was felt later and in a less extended sphere than that which bears the stamp of the genius of Schleiermacher. Doubtless the latter did not found a school, in the proper sense of the term, but his influence nevertheless dominates all the leading conceptions of our epoch, from the attempts at the restoration of Lutheran confessionalism to the limits of critical theology, through all shades on the side of conciliation. In diverse degrees, every theologian who thinks depends upon that great pioneer and has rendered homage to the principle according to which he renewed the

science of faith ; but each theologian has tried also to correct the application of that principle and, in the same measure, has modified the system based on the original foundation.

These attempts at correction are legitimate, for, however incontestable may be the fundamental axiom of Schleiermacher, it is certain that the corollaries which the master himself and the great majority of his immediate or more remote disciples have drawn from it are exposed to the most serious and best-founded criticisms.

## II.

“I, the Christian, am for myself, the theologian, the object of my science.”<sup>1</sup> These words of one of the most illustrious disciples of Schleiermacher express the thought common to the majority of the dogmatic attempts undertaken under the impulse of the principle of modern theology. In fact, he was the chief and spiritual father of the theoreticians of personal experience. Doubtless he demanded that each dogmatic thesis should make good its Christian origin and its Protestant character by its accord with the New Testament and with the confessions of evangelical faith ;<sup>2</sup> so also he relied frequently upon the religious testimony of Christ ; but in the course of

<sup>1</sup> HOFMANN, *Schriftbeweis* (Nördlingen, 1852-55, p. 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Der christliche Glaube*, § 27 : cf. *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*, § 289.

his exposition he made the phenomenon of his own subjective piety the source for Protestant dogmatics. That which the dogmatician is called upon to describe and analyze is the state of the soul of the Christian, his religious experience, the inner sentiment of the believing subject, the modifications of the consciousness of sin and of grace, the constitutive elements of the Christian consciousness. In fixing and confining within these limits the source of dogmatics, in isolating the individual phenomenon from the objective factor which determines it and unceasingly corrects it, Schleiermacher opened the door to an individualism which has been only partially faithful to the primitive inspiration of the Reformation, and which has neglected some of the most valuable elements of the spiritual heritage of our fathers.

To refute the extreme subjectivism of Schleiermacher and his followers, one might call attention to the analogy which maintains between his dogmatics and the philosophy contemporary with the great Christian thinker. The dogmatician who would pretend to draw the material of Christian doctrine from his own individual consciousness would fall into the illusion of Fichte, who dreamed the impossible enterprise of constructing the Non-ego while leaning upon the sole fact of the Ego. But let us leave these analogies, often deceiving and always incomplete, and let us con-

sider the point of view of pure experience in the light of the postulates of the Christian faith itself.

The theorists of personal experience attempt to take possession of ground which is neither large enough nor strong enough to support the weight of a dogmatic structure.

In the first place, the ground which they choose is too narrow. No one will dare, I think, to maintain that his own subjective experience embraces the full extent and exhausts the depths of Christian experiences accessible to all believers. Grant to an individual a spiritual life elevated to the highest degree; give to him the most delicate and the strongest moral consciousness; accumulate in his spirit the richest and most varied religious and moral treasures; you will still always have the feeling that you have come infinitely short of the Christian ideal. What sort of a dogmatician is he who could have the courage to claim for himself a privilege which he does not dare to attribute to any one of the founders and fathers of the church? There is only one man in history who has claimed for himself a cloudless knowledge of God and an unalterable communion with the heavenly Father; the Son alone has realized and manifested, in his life and in his death, the perfect moral and religious experience, whose gleams of light even his greatest disciples only partially apprehended and reproduced. We

can foresee, then, where will reside the indispensable corrective of the point of view of those who would draw the substance of dogmatics from the source of their own personal experience.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly necessary to say that the theologians whom we are opposing on this issue realize keenly the difficulty here indicated, and are trying to clear it from their pathway. They realize perfectly that in making their subjective Christianity the matter and source of their science of dogma they are bound to establish the universally Christian character of their own religious experiences. In a word, they are compelled to demonstrate that the phenomena analyzed are actually common to all true Christians; then, and then only, will they be protected from the dangers of arbitrariness, from the errors and vagaries of imagination, from the aberrations of a piety abandoned to itself and void of all restraint and control.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. V of this treatise.

<sup>2</sup> It is necessary that the Christian should observe in himself, first, the fact for which he proposes to furnish the theory; that is, the primary and indispensable condition of his study which sets out from himself and on the strength of a *personal* color of things. But this individual character is at the same time universal if the Christian life which the dogmatist describes develops in a normal manner, and it approaches this in the measure in which, in communion with other believers, the theologian always compares himself better with the objective fact of the Gospel.—BOVON, *Dogmatique chrétienne*, Vol. I, pp. 102, 103.

But how shall we fulfil such a condition? Where may be found this guaranty of Christian universality which the dogmatican must obtain under penalty of compromising both the Christian and the scientific character of his exposition? Are we advised to limit ourselves to the observation of others, to compare our own experiences with those of our brothers, to eliminate the dissimilar elements in order to retain only that which, in every instance, bears a like stamp and presents a common type? A dangerous prescription, since, in following it, it would be necessary to get out of ourselves and the closed camp of our individual consciousness; that is, we should have to condemn in principle the *subjective* method we had just lauded. A vain and illusory prescription also, since the object upon which our examination and comparison should bear would very often withdraw from our investigation. Truly pious natures do not spread before the eyes of their neighbors the treasures of their spiritual experiences; it is indeed difficult to penetrate into the sanctuary of their life hidden with Christ in God, to make it the material of a direct observation and precise inquiry, to comprehend and describe that which, in the majority of cases, remains a secret between God and their consciences. Moreover, even if it were possible to tear away all these veils and sound

all these mysteries, such a study of the souls of others would presuppose and require in us the faculty of taking our departure from a point between the normal religious experiences, on one hand, and emotions primarily foreign to Christianity or warped in their real nature on the other. Now, who would dare to claim that he possessed the necessary tact, the sure discernment, the infallible criteria for effecting this delicate discrimination?

This brings us to another embarrassment of the subjective method. Our personal experience is not only too narrow and too incomplete to serve as the source for dogmatic science; it is also subject to mistakes; it is too weak, too intermittent, too much tainted with error and sin, to make it possible for us to draw from our own consciousness as Christian the original material for our work as theologian. It suffices, to convince oneself of this, to examine these questions more closely and come down to some particular examples and concrete applications. Behold! In developing the Christian idea of God, the dogmatist would measure the reality of divine love by the intensity of his own feeling of it! In treating justification, he would make his own subjective faith its center of gravity! In speaking of the new life, he would rest the foundations of the Christian doctrine on the phenomena

which he might discover in himself! But has he not known, has he never perceived, that that inner certitude, which should bear the weight of a doctrinal construction, sometimes passes through fearful eclipses? Has not his inner life known dryness and emptiness, struggles and doubts, grievous and weakening fluctuations, bitter humiliations of defeat and failure? There are also experiences whose poignant reality the Christian most vividly attests, which cause him to long for a certitude founded elsewhere than on the moving sands of our sentiments, our thoughts, and our efforts. If the Christian, condemned by his own heart, appeals from it to God, who is far greater than his heart; if in the trouble of his spirit he has recourse to the immovable faithfulness of One in whom there is no shadow of turning; if he is happy to turn his mind away from his own ever-imperfect works and from his ever-insufficient faith and fix it upon a Savior who is the same yesterday, today, and forever—how, then, can the theologian dare to try to climb up by some other way? In order to guarantee the solidity of his system, ought he not to seek for himself also that same rock of which the believer has need, to assure the steadfastness of his faith?

Thanks to the precaution of the architect whose prudence the Master praises (Matt. 7:24,

25), the theologian will be freed from the servitude to which he is condemned if he imposes upon himself the task of recounting or scientifically expressing his individual experience; he will escape the torture of observing the states of his soul, of analyzing his thought and his sentiments, of following the oscillations of his piety, of measuring the temperature of his religious emotions, of submitting his Christian self to the manipulations of an experimentation multiplied, controlled, corrected without ceasing. And what would be the result of such a gigantic work? Superficial spirits and gross consciences would pride themselves on their petty progress and victory; they would transform the divine graces into human pretensions; from their privileges they would derive the right to condemn others in their own eyes less advanced than themselves; they would repeat, doubtless unconsciously, the prayer of the Pharisee. Others, righteous and truly pious spirits, would become profoundly convinced of the insufficiency and weakness of their inner religion; they would feel the emptiness of their experiences in comparison with that which their God demands; they would accuse themselves of lukewarmness, of infidelity, of cowardice; they would deplore the incredulity of their faith and the egotism of their charity; they would pass upon themselves a sentence of

unreserved condemnation; they would give themselves up without mercy to eternal misery; they would perish in a wreckage the more tragic according as their efforts had been the more sincere. In other words, the abyss of presumption, or of despair—these are the inevitable issues open to him who does not know how to withdraw from himself, who persists in seeking in his personal experiences the material of his religious testimony and the substance of his dogmatic formulas. The theologian, in fact, does not come under a law different from that which governs the Christian. If it is true that the foundation of our peace and of our strength, of our life and our joy, rests elsewhere than on the sands of our emotions, our reflections, our resolutions, it is then very evident that the dogmatician who would make his own consciousness the foundation and the sanction of his scientific work would undertake a fatal task, and would finally be swept into the abyss.

It goes without saying that neither Schleiermacher nor any one of his disciples, conservative or progressive, falls under this judgment. There is not a single theorist of personal experience who, in fact, has resolutely committed himself to the course whose dangers we have indicated. This is true because there is not a single theologian who, in giving account of his own experi-

ence, has been able to disregard the factors which constitute or guarantee precisely the Christian character of his individual experience. The very fact of his *Christian* consciousness implies and presupposes a criterion independent of the subjective states of mind of the theologian, a type with which he compares himself and by which he judges himself, a sanction from which he does not mean to free himself. Hence, these dogmatists themselves indicate to us the direction in which it is necessary to proceed in order to rectify their error or fill up the gap in their procedure. The more or less important position which each of these theologians gives to the Holy Scriptures or to ecclesiastical traditions would alone suffice to show us that their individualism is not absolute and that they provide for themselves a certain counterpoise and control. But how do Schleiermacher and the majority of the dogmatists faithful to his method proceed? They uniformly develop first the content of their own Christian consciousness and analyze the elements which constitute it. It is only after this has been done that they propose to have recourse to the testimony of the ecclesiastical tradition and to the authority of Holy Scripture. This subsequent examination is charged with the task of justifying the results acquired by the psychological and religious analysis. The least fault

of this process consists in its strange illusion. Ecclesiastical consensus and scriptural proof, invoked secondarily, and often developed with a grand display of erudition, come too late and too often appear merely as a display. The dogmatician has already made his campaign; his position is fortified; he would not consent to retire from it after having made his conquest so laboriously. If necessary, he will blandly hunt up texts to accord with his results; he will bend the declarations of Holy Scripture or the ecclesiastical symbols to the exigencies of his thought; he will not shrink from equivocal compromises and questionable accommodations; he will sin against perspicuity, if not against honesty and integrity. There are illustrious examples which show that these fears are not chimerical.

### III.

To solve the problem of the source of faith, it will suffice to follow seriously the hints which Schleiermacher himself gives us, and which the majority of contemporary theologians pursue with more or less consistency and clearness.

If it is true that dogmatics creates nothing by itself, if it is limited to a scientific exposition of the affirmations of the Protestant faith, then the question of the source of dogmatics is identical with the question of the source of faith. In a word,

at this point the position of the dogmatist is not different from that of the believer; he finds his base of operation in the midst of the Christian community; his task consists in analyzing the faith of the church, in developing its content, in connecting together its affirmations; he has nothing to add to that, nothing to take from it. The theologian is here distinguished from the simple believer only in that the former develops into severely scientific propositions what the latter possesses in a state of immediate certainty and of involved truth, so to speak; but both draw the substance of their faith from a common source, from an identical spiritual treasury.

What, then, is this living source whence proceeds the faith of the Protestant Christian? The answer could not be ambiguous. It is the Gospel, that is, the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ; the Gospel which, by its redemptive and sanctifying power, awakes, in the soul thirsting for forgiveness and righteousness, confidence in the eternal mercy, certainty of forgiveness and divine adoption, victorious power over sin and the world. Such is the unique object of the Christian faith, its sovereign and permanent principle.

What conclusion? This: Faith is the legitimate and pure source of dogmatics only when it is in union with the divine factor which inspires

it and which, without ceasing, conditions and establishes it.<sup>1</sup> The source of dogmatics is that faith which has assimilated to itself the eternal essence of the Gospel, or the Gospel in its apprehension by the mysterious power of faith. To isolate faith from the divine agent which has created it and which sustains it, to deprive it of the positive content which it draws from revelation—that is to dry the sap which alone gives it life and preserves it; that is to tear it up by the roots and take away its nourishment; it is to condemn the soul to feed itself on its own hunger.

It is, indeed, very true that the faith whose affirmations the dogmatist should develop and analyze exists in a state of religious experience in the living member of the Christian community; but that experience is not religious and Christian, hence is not the object and source of dogmatics, except in so far as it identifies itself with the divine content of the evangelical revelation. It follows, therefore, that, properly understood and referred back to their full and complete significance, the two theses, "the source of dogmatics is faith," and "the source of dogmatics is

<sup>1</sup> LUTHER, *Cat. Major*, I, 3: "Haec duo, fides et Deus, una copula conjugenda sunt." *Operationes in Psalmos* (ed. Erl. *Opera latin*, XIV, 259): "Objectum fidei et spei est Deus promissor gratuitus seu ipsum verbum promittentis atque aliud nihil." MELANCTHON, *Apol. Conf. Aug.*, II, 50: "Inter se correlative comparat et connecti promissionem et fidem."

the Gospel," far from excluding and contradicting each other, complement and legitimize each other.<sup>1</sup> Suppress one of these two terms and you will fall either into a subjectivism without any positive control or into an objectivism without any inner life; you will commit either the error of the mystics who disdain the realities of history or that of the traditionalists who lose sight of the interests of piety.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher at times happily announced the identity of these two formulas; unfortunately, he did not turn to account sufficiently the valuable hints which he himself gave. See, for example, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 19: "Es gibt nur eine Quelle, aus welcher alle christliche Lehre abgeleitet wird, nämlich die Selbstverkündigung Christi, und nur eine Art, wie die Lehre, vollkommener oder unvollkommener, aus dem frommen Bewusstsein selbst und dem unmittelbaren Ausdruck desselben entsteht."

<sup>2</sup> "Christianity is both subjective and objective; only by being both of these can it be the religion of salvation. It is an objective entity, since the redemptive work comes from God and is consummated only by the grace of God manifested in Jesus, the only begotten Son. But the Gospel is not the less certainly subjective, since its mighty power cannot be realized, from beginning to end, save by the inner renewal of man. Remove that exterior element revealed to us by historical Christianity, and you make Christianity the race course for fantasies of speculation and illuminism. Suppress the inner side, that which Paul called 'the life hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3), that is, the personal union with Jesus and the divine power on which it depends — religion becomes at once and above all else a matter of intellectualism or practical stagnation. The subjective without the objective is salvation without Christ, an illusion. The objective without the subjective is Christ without the intimacy of faith, a chimera."—BOVON, *Dogmatique chrétienne*, Vol. I, p. 96.

The solution we are trying to give to the problem of the source of dogmatics clarifies the developments included in the preceding chapters, particularly the definition we have given to dogma and dogmatic science. Thus appears the complete meaning which we attach to the terms "religious experience" and "Christian consciousness," frequently employed. We do not mean by "experiences" the states of mind independent of the objective factor which determines them, and "Christian consciousness" is not, in our estimation, an abstract form, deprived of all positive content; far from it. It deserves that good name only in so far as it draws its nourishment and its substance from the rich soil of the evangelical revelation. Thus we have been careful to note that the Christian consciousness is the child of the Gospel; that it has been formed and has developed itself under the constant influence of a divine power; that it is, to tell the truth, only the Spirit of God working in the life of believers, not by means of a magical illumination, but through the testimony whose center and object is the Savior.

Is it an illusion to think that this manner of presenting the problem and of formulating its solution is putting into operation and consistent practice the religious principle of the Reforma-

tion,<sup>1</sup> taken up again, doubtless, but imperfectly applied, by Schleiermacher? In making dogmatics the scientific exposition of the Christian faith, we do not assign to it the purely subjective function of describing the states of mind of the Christian isolated from their objective principle; we propose to affirm vigorously the spiritual realities assurance of which the Christian acquires or possesses by means of his faith in Jesus Christ and his communion with the Savior.<sup>2</sup>

Thus understood, the question of the source

<sup>1</sup>The Reformers refer indefinitely to the Holy Scripture, the Word of God, or the Gospel as the source and norm of faith and theology (LUTHER, *Artic. Smalc.*, II, 2; MELANCTHON, *Corp. Reform.*, XXI, 82; I, 143; ZWINGLI, *Conclusiones*, V, XV, XVI; CALVIN, *Inst. Chrét.*, I, 6-9; *Formul. Conc.*, Preface; *Confess. Helv. Posterior*, Art. 1). Ritschl would also make the New Testament the source and rule of systematic theology (*Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, II<sup>3</sup>, §§ 2, 3). We will try to explain later (Chaps. V, VI), why the substitution of the Gospel or Revelation for the Holy Scriptures seems to us necessary.

<sup>2</sup>For the thesis formulated by Schleiermacher (*Der christliche Glaube*, § 15): "Christliche Glaubenssätze sind Auffassungen der christliche frommen Gemüthszustände in der Rede dargestellt" ("Christian dogmas are the conceptions of the soul in a state of Christian piety, expounded in discourse"), Reischle proposes to substitute the following, which seems to us very pertinent: "Christliche Glaubenssätze sind Bezeichnungen derjenigen Wirklichkeit, welche dem Christen in Vertrauen zu Christo gewiss und erfahrbar werden soll" ("Christian dogmas are the marks of that reality which should be certain and assured in the Christian in his confidence in Christ").—*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. I (1889), p. 349.

of dogmatics is enlarged and elevated; it necessarily calls forth another problem, which throws light upon it, complements and strengthens it: What is the norm of Protestant dogmatics? That is the question we shall now try to discuss.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE NORM OF PROTESTANT DOGMATICS.

Nature of the question : the problem of the norm of dogmatics is equivalent to that of authority in matters of faith.

I. *Elimination of the legal authority of confessions of faith.*—The Catholic point of view.—The point of view of Protestant orthodoxy.—Examination of the solution proposed by confessional theology.—Negative results : the confessional solution is contrary to the religious principle of the Reformation ; it is refuted by the testimony which the creeds render to themselves ; it is unrealizable in practice ; it has never been applied without serious reservations and numerous exceptions.—Positive results : historical and religious importance of the confessions of faith ; authentic documents of the Protestant faith.

II. *Elimination of the legal authority of the Holy Scriptures.*—Examination of the solution proposed by traditional orthodoxy.—Negative results : the general surrender of the doctrine of literal inspiration ; necessity of drawing conclusions from these premises ; impossibility of application of the orthodox solution ; contradiction between the traditional theory and the constant practice of its own adherents.—Positive results : the Bible the witness of the Gospel ; Christ the source of the authority of the Holy Scriptures ; the nature and limits of this authority.

III. *Attempt at a positive solution.*—Distinctive marks of religious authority in the Protestant church.—The Gospel, the Word of God, the Christian revelation, Jesus Christ ; formal difference but fundamental identity of these terms.—Spiritual and experimental legalization in the evangelical and Protestant sense.—Answer to the objections opposed to this solution.—The new question raised by the results acquired : How shall the norm of Protestant dogmatics be applied?

TO SOLVE the problem of the norm of Protestant dogmatics it is necessary to return to the

invariable point of departure of our researches—the definition of dogmatic science. If Protestant dogmatics is the systematic exposition of the Protestant faith, the latter has the same norm as the former. The rule which governs the dogmatist is precisely the same religious authority to which he submits himself as a Christian. There can be no doubt at this point: the question we have stated is equivalent to that of authority in matters of faith.

To embrace this problem in all its extent, to treat it on every side and reach a conclusion which would take account of all the elements of so great a subject, it would be necessary to leap over the limits of a mere introduction to dogmatics and enter into the very heart of the theological system itself. But without infringing on so great a field, it is possible and necessary to state some of the elements and indicate some of the principles calculated to orient and assure the course to be pursued by the dogmatist. That task is made easy for us by certain excellent works which have recently appeared in French literature, and which justify the hope that we are approaching a substantial consensus of opinion on the part of all theologians concerned for the interests of piety and for the independence of scientific thought.

## I.

Nothing is simpler or more comprehensible than the answer of Catholicism to the question stated. In the Catholic church the norm of dogmatics could be only the religious authority in vogue in that church, that is, the decisions of the councils, to which must be added, according to the Roman doctrine, the decrees of the pope. Greek Catholicism erects into supreme authority the creeds of the seven ecumenical councils whose plenary inspiration it maintains. Roman Catholicism maintains that the papacy is the permanent incarnation and infallible organ of the Holy Spirit. The church forming, by divine right, a judicial organism, the condition of entrance into it is not primarily a spiritual and inner condition; it arises rather from the sphere of law and corresponds to the bond which attaches the citizen to the state; it is a condition of exterior and legal sanction. Within the realm of such a church the confession of faith is a judicial authority which, after the fashion of a political constitution, exacts obedience and demands submission. That obedience does not need to be intelligent, and the submission is very often reduced to a passive acquiescence, to "implicit faith" which accepts *in toto* the traditional creed and surrenders blindly to ecclesiastical tutelage. We have tried above to indicate the results

of this spiritual surrender of the individual into the hands of an external power foreign to the conscience of the believer.<sup>1</sup> It is of especial importance, with reference to the field which is the object of our present inquiry, to note that Catholicism would belie itself if it should admit, as the norm of its dogmatics, any purely spiritual authority; that it glories in possessing, in the canons of its councils and the bulls of its popes, a concrete and tangible organism of firm and precise rules, tracing for its children a clear and sure pathway, preserving them from the aberrations of the individual mind, relieving them of heavy and fearful responsibility, guaranteeing to them a monopoly of religious truth and access to necessary graces and supreme felicities.

Although the Reformation had mercilessly demolished the grand illusion which the Catholic church nourished in the hearts of its followers, the fiction of an external and legal authority again soon found life and credence in our Protestant communities; it imposed itself, under a double form, upon the spirits and consciences of believers, under the form of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and the form of the Lutheran or Reformed confessionalism. In the orthodox period, which succeeded the creative epoch of the Reformation, the confessions of faith, the official

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. II, § I.

and obligatory creeds, finally gained the ascendancy over the authority of the Bible, the meaning and interpretation of which they assumed to establish and regulate. It is well to note briefly the very palpable and massive doctrine which raised the letter and the content of the ecclesiastical creeds into the norm of Protestant dogmatics. Doubtless, rigid confessionalism has lost footing among our Protestant churches, but one would be strangely mistaken to suppose it forever dead; it still displays offensive renewals, recrudescences of fighting zeal the more furious as it feels the ground slip from under its feet; in each of these passionate attacks—desperate efforts in behalf of a lost cause—it discloses more clearly its inner nature and reveals itself as a piteous counterfeit of Catholicism, whose power and magnificence it does not possess, but whose intolerant spirit and despotic bearing it does maintain.

Without entering upon a purely negative polemic, we will discuss this question further and briefly indicate in what consists the dogmatic value of confessions of faith, what they cannot and will not give to us, and the services which we have the right to demand and expect of them. This brief examination will not be a useless digression, but will yield a direct contribution to the study of the problem in question—the norm of Protestant dogmatics.

A word first as to the creeds of the ancient church, which have been honored with the inexact title of the "ecumenical symbols." The authority of these symbols is confused with the authority of the churches which promulgated them and transmitted them to us. The declarations and the attitude of our Reformers should not deceive us as to the character and trustworthiness of the dogmatic formulas bequeathed by the Catholic church to Protestant generations. These formulas, it is true, have been placed in the official documents of the majority of evangelical communions. Calvin made much of the so-called apostolic creed; Luther extolled the pretended Athanasian creed as one of the most beautiful works of the Holy Spirit since the times of the apostles; Zwingli found in the "ecumenical symbols" the faithful expression of biblical doctrine; Melancthon holds to agreement with the doctrines of the ancient church, and finds thereby the proof of the truthfulness and pure catholicity of the leaders of the Reformation; but, in spite of this positive and conservative attitude of each of our Reformers, it would be singularly imprudent to appeal to their testimony and example in order to restore the Catholic point of view in reference to the appreciation of the ancient creeds. Between that point of view and the religious principle of Protestantism there

is a positive and indestructible contradiction. The truly Christian and evangelical knowledge of the spiritual and inner character of faith is absolutely antagonistic to the Catholic idea and practice. Upon what foundation and under what title did the Reformers adhere to the formulas of Nicea and Chalcedon? Is it a passive submission to exterior and legal tradition that commands their assent and determines their resolutely conservative attitude? By no means. If they accept the Catholic christology and theology, if they make indiscriminate use of the formulas elaborated by the Fathers and sanctioned by the councils, it is because they are convinced that the ancient creeds are in actual agreement with the religious truth taught in the Holy Scriptures. It is not submission to the church, it is their obedience to the Gospel, that inspires and rules their words and conduct. So true is this that they put the stamp of their own religious thought upon the theological content and formulation of the "ecumenical" symbols. If they found in the documents of the ancient church the expression of their evangelical faith, it is because they began to read these documents in the light of their faith; they employed old bottles to hold new wine, but at many points the bottles broke and the wine was spilt.\*

\*It is said that in the English-speaking Presbyterian

The experience of the Reformers contains a great and precious lesson for us. It teaches us to take as against the confessions of faith, of which they were the authors and guardians, a positive and loyal attitude, freely and fully in harmony with that personal and inner faith whose rights they regained by opening up for us a royal road leading straight to the Gospel. In other words, they peremptorily forbid us to canonize the letter and the content of the Protestant creeds. To raise to the height of sovereign and indisputable rules the documents by which Luther and Zwingli, Melancthon and Calvin purposed, not to found a new doctrine, but to profess their faith in the Gospel and render testimony to the Christian life, would be to refute their teaching and betray their example and cause. Whether it be the Confession of Augsburg or of La Rochelle, the Catechism of Heidelberg or the Thirty-Nine Articles, not one of these symbols claims to be for us an unchangeable and perfect chart; to confer upon them statutory and legal authority is to change the natural rôle which they claim for themselves and attack the very principle which created them. Is it necessary to cite texts? There is an abundance of them. The revision of the Westminster Confession is demanded by many of the most pious and learned theologians and laity.—See BRIGGS, *Whither?* 1889; SCHAFF, *Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches*, 1890; WARFIELD, *On the Revision of the Confession of Faith*, 1890.

dance of them. Luther made a tour of visitation and inspection among the communities that had responded to his voice, and published a series of articles to guide and instruct the spiritual leaders of these communities. How did he introduce these articles so as to make them acceptable to his adherents? He did not think of "imposing on the conscience of the believers the yoke of new decretals, but he relied upon their spontaneous response and the free adherence of their love to submit themselves to these new propositions until it should please the Holy Spirit to guide them in finding better ones."<sup>1</sup> In elaborating the Confession of Augsburg, Melancthon did not think of formulating a final and infallible creed: we know with what care and perseverance he forced himself unceasingly to correct and improve his work. The modifications which he introduced into it did not concern merely the form and style; they extended to the very foundation and entered into the heart of some of the most controverted doctrines of the time.<sup>2</sup> The prefaces of some of the most important creeds of the Reformed churches express the same sentiment as did Luther and his

<sup>1</sup>LUTHER, *Unterricht der Visitatoren an die Pfarrherren in Herzog Heinrichs zu Sachsen Fürstenthum, erste und grossere Vorrede* (1528, ed. Erlang.), Vol. XXIII, esp. p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Successive revisions of the years 1531, 1533, 1536, 1538, especially 1540 (*Confessio variata*). See, also, Art. XV of the Augsburg Confession (*Deritibus ecclesiasticis*).

direct co-workers. The promoters of the Reformation did not aspire to dominate the faith of their brethren; they endeavored only to contribute to their joy (2 Cor. 1:24).<sup>1</sup>

We would remind those who would impose upon us the yoke of obligatory creeds that it was not through the churches that confessions of faith first took on a judicial character and placed themselves under an official sanction; it was the civil power which, identifying itself with a determined confession, renewed the traditions of the Holy Roman Empire—I was about to say the theory and practice of antique paganism—by transforming the religious affirmations of the church into authoritative documents incorporated in the laws of the State, imposed by force and guarded by the secular power.

But let us enter for a moment into the thought of those we oppose; let us place ourselves on the ground of rigorous confessionalism and grant the canonical and normative value of the creeds: then, indeed, will the real difficulties arise on all sides and the principle of external authority, apparently so simple and convenient, will produce perplexities recurring without ceasing.

Born of the practical needs of the churches, inspired by the necessities of the epoch, all the

<sup>1</sup> *Basileensis prior*, Conclusion; *Scoticana Confessio fidei*, Preface; *Helvetica posterior*, Preface (ed. Niemeyer), pp. 104, 341, 464.

confessions of faith bear the imprint of the times and the environment which witnessed their creation; they are the works of circumstance, often the works of polemics, evolved out of controversies of which we are sometimes hardly able to comprehend the importance or even grasp the meaning.<sup>1</sup> There is not a creed, however brief, which does not contain accidental elements, aimed at certain adversaries, addressed to readers not existing today; furnishing, perhaps, a solution for their own time, but not answering to any other actual exigencies. Or shall we for the moment overlook the historical setting whose distinct mark each document bears, and put all the confessions of our churches on the same level? Will one accord the same credence to creeds universally adopted and to those which only a fraction of the Christian world or of Protestantism has recognized? Will one appeal indiscriminately to the Confession of Augsburg and to the Formula of Concord, to the Catechism of Geneva and to the Canons of Dortrecht, to the Westminster Confession and to the *Formula consensus Helvetici*? And in a given community, shall we make no difference between the documents of the creative period and the works of a later epoch of less original spirit and less scope?

<sup>1</sup> That is a point which Schleiermacher and Vinet have raised and which has often been insisted upon since their day.

These questions once determined, would it then be possible to utilize the confessions of faith and draw from them our dogmatic formulas ready made and complete? By no means. The difficulties of detail are not less numerous than the difficulties of principle. I will give only one example: Our Protestant creeds set forth the teachings of Scripture by an exegesis whose legitimacy and exactness we very often repudiate. The hermeneutic principles practiced in the sixteenth century are no longer ours, and the results obtained by the help of those principles often appear to us unreliable. Shall we close our eyes to these differences? Can we accept these processes of interpretation, a method of argumentation, a system of proofs and demonstration, which today are unhesitatingly condemned and cannot be conscientiously applied? Or, to clear the difficulties, shall we try to compromise between the spirit and the letter of the creeds, between the form and the content, the essential and the accidental? Such an effort would assuredly be legitimate and praiseworthy, but to avoid the reproach of arbitrariness there would be demanded a series of rare qualifications and infinitely delicate operations. Large and strong theological culture, exact and complete knowledge of the history of each creed, profound understanding of the doctrines set forth, certain

discernment of the accidental needs of the time and of the permanent interests of piety—in truth, the theologian who possessed all these gifts would be worthy and doubtless capable of formulating for himself a confession of faith, and we could not have the heart to condemn him to the task of restoring the old creeds and torturing texts in order to get out of them a problematical or equivocal meaning.

If, again, we compare the theology of our creeds with the ideas of their most ardent defenders, we shall see that confessionalism, sanctioned in theory, is practiced by its adherents in a singularly intermittent manner. Without dwelling on the reproaches of "heterodoxy" and "heresy" which the most distinguished representatives of confessionalism periodically exchange and vie in throwing at each other, it is allowable to submit that school to a summary examination the result of which would hardly be favorable to the canonization of the creeds. How many points there are on which there breaks out dissent between the formal text of our confessions and the most robust and resolute orthodoxy of our times! The ninth article of the Augsburg Confession teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation;<sup>1</sup> the eleventh article supports pri-

<sup>1</sup>"De baptismo docent, quod sit necessarius ad salutem" (German text: "Von der Taufe wird gelehrt, dass sie nöthig sei").

vate confession;<sup>1</sup> the Apology preserves the three sacraments, repentance with baptism and the Lord's Supper;<sup>2</sup> the smaller catechism of Luther recommends to believers the sign of the cross before the morning prayer;<sup>3</sup> the demonology of the creeds, especially of those which proceed from Luther, is so massive that the most decidedly orthodox followers tacitly agree to conceal it. The majority of the confessions fall back for support upon the pretended Athanasian formula which makes eternal blessedness depend on the admission of a theory as subtle as it is anti-biblical;<sup>4</sup> the Gallican Confession teaches that the great majority of men are predestined by the will of God to endless torments;<sup>5</sup> the *Formula consensus Helvetici* maintains the inspiration of the vowel points of the text of the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> It would be easy to multiply these

<sup>1</sup>“De confessione docent, quod absolutio privata retinenda sit quamquam in confessione non sit necessaria omnium delictorum enumeratio.”

<sup>2</sup>*Apology*, VII, 4: “Vere igitur sunt sacramenta, Baptismus, Coena domini, absolutio, quae est sacramentum poenitentiae.”

<sup>3</sup>*Append.*, I, 1: “Mane cum surgis e lecto, signabis te signo sanctae crucis dicens. . . .”

<sup>4</sup>“Quicunque vult salvus esse, ante omnia opus habet, ut teneat catholicam fidem. Quam nisi quisque integrum inviolatamque servaverit, absque dubio in aeternum peribit” (§§ 1, 2; cf. §§ 26, 27, 40).

<sup>5</sup>*Conf. Gallicana*, Art. XII; cf. *Conf. Belgica*, Art. XVII.

<sup>6</sup>Canons I-III. It is the second canon which contains the

examples; these that I have mentioned show with sufficient clearness that on many points the authority of the creeds is abandoned by the same people who, in theory, constitute themselves the partisans and advocates of the creeds.

But without considering further the present situation, let us take a backward look and consult history. Who would dare to maintain that the religious life of our evangelical churches is in direct proportion to the respect or culture accorded to the confessions of faith? What have been the most virile and most fruitful epochs in the development of Protestantism? Is it under the régime of rigid orthodoxy and extreme confessionalism that piety has been richest and most vigorous and has borne its most beautiful fruits and produced its best works? Does not this retrospect confirm an oft-renewed experience? Does it not recall to our minds that living faith is something other than adherence to a formula or submission to a rule; that correctness in doctrine does not by any means assure sanity of the moral life and warmth of charity; that the most valiant disciples of Christ have too often been the outcasts or the victims of official orthodoxy?<sup>1</sup> If

famous definition of the text of the Old Testament: "Tum quoad consonas tum quoad vocalia, sive puncta ipsa sive punctorum saltem potestatem, et tum quoad res, tum quoad verba θεοπνευστος —(ed. Niemeyer, pp. 730, 731).

<sup>1</sup> In 1695 Pastor Schelwig, of Danzig, pointed out 150 here-

this is true, why should it be necessary to bestow a thought on the call to arms by which we are sometimes summoned in favor of the authoritative character of the so-called Apostolic Creed, in favor of official and obligatory liturgies, superannuated and often unintelligible confessions of faith? What shall we say of those who would again place people and pastors, ministers and teachers, under the yoke of these external rules? Should we not fear that the imprudent people who devote themselves to this piece of patchwork will strike their consciences a severe blow, or, what would be no less fatal, will become, in spite of themselves, guilty of hypocrisy, opening the door to doubtful accommodations, to equivocal silence, to disloyalty and falsehood? Certainly it would be rash to question the sincerity of those who agitate this method, frightening simple souls, and uttering the cry of alarm in order to impose upon the sons of the Reformation a servitude far heavier, but less magnificent, than the chains broken by our fathers; it would be unjust to suppose that those who load heavy burdens on the shoulders of their brethren would not themselves lift a little finger; but the experiences in the works of Spener. The same year Professor Deutschmann was commissioned by the faculty of theology of Wittenberg to make a catalogue of the heresies and errors of Spener; he discovered 264.—See GRÜNBERG, *Philipp Jakob Spener*, Vol. I (Göttingen, 1893), pp. 276–92, 297–303.

ence of the centuries moves us to affirm that these simple or skilful people who expect the salvation of the church and of society to come out of a confessional reaction are attempting the impossible enterprise of pursuing Satan by calling to their aid the prince of devils.

However, our ardor in opposing the canonization of the creeds erected into religious authority and rules of dogma would be blind and fatal if it caused us to forget that ecclesiastical creeds, properly understood and wisely used, are calculated to render us valuable and indispensable service. The Protestant dogmatist who ignores or neglects the documents in which our churches have "confessed their faith" and formulated their doctrine exposes himself to dangers and errors against which one could not be too well fortified. Although the symbols may not and ought not to be infallible "decretals," the majority of them attach themselves so closely to the origin of our churches, they are such important and necessary factors of our religious history, they establish or preserve with so great force and originality the creative and directing principles of our Christian renaissance, that they will remain forever the classical monuments of Protestantism and the authentic witnesses of its piety and its beliefs. Therefore it is to these original sources that we must ever return in order to rec-

ognize and appreciate the primitive inspiration and guiding thought of the Protestant life and doctrine. It is not an interest of pure historical curiosity which ought to bring us back unceasingly to these most venerable documents; recognition, understanding of our confessions of faith, is the necessary condition of all true dogmatic progress. If it is true that the religious principles of Protestantism have been expressed, in different degrees and with unequal clearness and vigor, in the official declarations of our churches, then we should conclude that the normal and fruitful development of these principles will have its organic development only from the germ whose growth has brought life and liberty to Christianity. Our vocation, then, is not to ignore or to destroy the tradition inaugurated by our creeds, but to translate clearly and apply consistently the truth regained by our Reformers; to eliminate the Catholic leaven which was mingled with the ferment of the Gospel and which weakens its power and expansion; to disengage, to place in full light, to render completely dominant the type of religious life and faith contained in the dignified, though constantly improvable, charters of the church of Luther, of Zwingli, and of Calvin. The more the dogmatist succeeds in fulfilling, not in abolishing, the ecclesiastical tradition, that is, in restoring to its permanent mean-

ing and regaining in all its religious depth the testimony of our fathers, the more will he truly conform to the spirit and to the principle of our Reformers, the more will he perform a task useful to the church, a labor eminently evangelical and Protestant.

Have I succeeded in showing that the renunciation of legal and statutory authority of confessions of faith does not imply by any means the breaking of the beneficent chain which binds us to the heroic days of the Reformation? As grateful and respectful sons, our ambition is to unite with a fidelity, which piously receives the immortal legacy of the past, the courage and liberty which do honor to the memory of the Fathers, and which we find in their inspiring example; not merely to profit by their treasures and draw from them new riches each day, but also to sacrifice the false or doubtful values which tarnish the pure gold of their glorious legacy.

## II.

Whatever may be the differences which maintain between the confessions of faith of our evangelical churches, they all agree upon this point: they submit themselves to the constant control of the Holy Scriptures, and they demand that they shall be judged, and, if need be, corrected, according to the light of what has re-

cently been called the "formal principle"<sup>1</sup> of Protestantism. Let us follow the guidance of our creeds; let us not hesitate to receive their declarations and weigh their testimony; let us also open the book of which they wished to be only the docile interpreters. Is the Bible the supreme religious authority, and can it serve as the norm of Protestant dogmatics?<sup>2</sup>

The absolute authority of the Bible, raised in all its parts to the sovereign rule of faith, cannot be maintained and justified except by those who adhere without reservation to the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scripture, as the direct work of God and the permanent incarnation of his Spirit. They alone who identify the divine revelation with the letter of the Old and New Testaments have the right to call themselves the partisans or defenders of the canonical and normative authority of the biblical books. As soon as one concedes to human activity any part whatever in the composition of the Scriptures, he opens the door to error, or at least to chances and possibilities of error. There

<sup>1</sup>That is, the Inspiration of the Scriptures. [TRANSLATOR.]

<sup>2</sup>It goes without saying that our present task is not to examine, in all its entirety, the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. That has its place in the system proper of dogmatics; but the dogmatist cannot avoid taking some position, at the outset, with reference to the problem of the religious and dogmatic authority of the Bible.

is no middle ground possible here; negation of verbal inspiration carries with it negation of the doctrine of the infallibility of the sacred books.

This is not the place to examine the doctrine maintained by ancient orthodoxy, renewed and vigorously developed by Gaußen and the men of the revival. In theory, it has today very few adherents among thinking theologians. Its unsoundness and peril have been sufficiently exposed. Profoundly pious spirits, eminently conservative theologians, have traced its historical development, and its cause is irretrievably lost. It is recognized that it corresponds neither to the distinctive character and inner nature of the Bible nor to the testimony which the sacred authors render concerning themselves; it has been shown that it presupposes and involves a superficial, intellectualistic, mechanical conception of religion, of revelation, of the activity of God in the history of humanity and in the souls of believers; its undeniable dangers have been unveiled, wherein it tends to make of the Christian faith simple assent and to substitute the human record of divine revelation for the Word of God made flesh and manifested in Jesus Christ. But if, theoretically, it is agreed to cast aside this notion of "dictation" by the Holy Spirit, then it is very necessary that one should have the courage to draw the practical conclu-

sions from the premises. How many theologians, how many pastors, are there who, in their teaching and preaching, appeal to Scripture as though the Bible were a doctrinal formulary, a sacred code or ritual! How many readers, not alone among the pious laity, search in their Bibles for an infallible external guidance, a rule which they extract from texts and apply to life or to their beliefs as a judge or lawyer consults briefs and handles judicial and legislative instruments! How many Protestants are there to whom the Bible thus becomes what the church is to the Catholic—a vast system of supernatural guarantees, to which they sometimes “attach themselves by a bond the more passionately strong according as they are the less certain about the things themselves!”<sup>1</sup>

It would seem that the difficulties of such an enterprise would weary those who brave the undertaking; for finally, in order to consult the Bible as one turns the leaves of a manual of administration or a body of laws and decrees, the first duty would be to have recourse to the original text of the document which is to serve as a rule and oracle. Now, where shall we find that authentic and infallible text? Who does not know that the manuscripts that have come to us have existed relatively but a short time? Can

<sup>1</sup>L. MONOD, *Questions religieuses du jour*, p. 37.

one forget that the very oldest manuscript of the Old Testament did not exist prior to the tenth century, and that the most valuable manuscripts of the New Testament do not date prior to the fourth century? Who, moreover, is ignorant that between these manuscripts and the different groups of manuscripts the variations are reckoned by thousands? That in the majority of these cases the divergences may be void of dogmatic importance is of no concern; to point out one divergence is sufficient to prove that the claim of an infallible, or even universally received, text is a piece of fiction denied by the facts. Moreover, even if such a text did exist, it would be directly accessible to only a few Christians. For the great majority of readers the Bible exists only in more or less exact translations; is there a single one of these that can be declared free from the possibility of error? Do not the manifold attempts in all Protestant countries to give an ever more faithful and vivid version prove that our churches do not think of attributing infallibility to any one of the translations produced by them? Certainly the history of the translation of the Septuagint or of that of the Vulgate shows that the Greek or Roman Catholic church is not very happy in the assertion that either of these versions is free from the weaknesses of human work.

A simple examination of the facts will suffice to reduce to an absurdity the faith in an infallible text; the notion of a providential and divine canon can no longer resist an impartial historical study.

Who made the New Testament? Who has gathered together these books of very diverse form and origin? Who made the choice between those elected and those rejected? Who made an end of all uncertainty as to the canon? The history of the fifth century answers: The ancient Catholic church; and it did it in such a manner that the dogmatic canon of the New Testament, the dogma of dogmas upon which some advocates would rest all other dogmas, itself rests, in the last analysis, merely upon the authority of the church. In vain do they object to this deposition of history. Those who divinize the collection of books of the New Testament should also divinize the tradition of a church which they maintain in other respects is contaminated by heathenish errors and all manner of superstitions. Such is the vicious circle within which the theory of the dogmatic authority of the Bible imprisons and destroys itself, in so far as it would rest on external and historical proofs.<sup>1</sup>

We are aware that Catholicism is free from this criticism and avoids this contradiction, but by what means and at what price? By the decree of the divine origin and infallible character of the ecclesiastical tradition. That theory is logical and consistent on condition that one goes a step farther and postulates with Rome, for

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER: "Le Nouveau Testament contient-il des dogmes?" *Revue chrétienne*, Vol. I (1892), p. 29.

the interpretation of Scripture and tradition, a guide absolutely free from error, an infallible and sovereign supervision. In effect, it is notorious that infinitely diverse practices and teachings alike appeal to the authority of the Bible with imperturbable confidence. Parties of the opposition at variance with the church in the Middle Ages justified their apocalyptic dreams and communistic endeavors by the Holy Scriptures; and even in our day, within the circle of Christianity, how many sects are there which, if we hold to the letter of the Bible, are assuredly more faithful to scriptural teaching than are the most orthodox members of our churches?

One must have the courage to declare this without any evasion. The Bible does not present itself to us under the form of a dogmatic system let down from heaven and bearing the seal of infallibility. To transform it into an external and legal authority which rules faith and dictates belief is to impose upon it a character which is foreign to it and which it has never claimed.

To deny this would also be to deny the clearest and most decisive teaching of history. In a word, inadmissible in theory, unrealizable in practice, the rule maintained by scriptural scholasticism has never been effectively followed or truly practiced. It is a fact that our Reformers developed, by preference, the leading ideas of

the Pauline theology, and that they neglected or sacrificed the elements of religious testimony in the New Testament which, rightly or wrongly, they found irreconcilable with the gospel of Paul. It is a fact that the Puritans of the seventeenth century sought the rule of their conduct and the type of their language in the historical books of the Old Testament. It is a fact that some of the most vigorous and active sects of Protestantism have made the *Apocalypse* the favored object of their meditations and the habitual balm for their souls.

What must we conclude? That the most resolute adherents to the theory of verbal inspiration cannot and never have put a like value on all of the passages of the Holy Scriptures; they have never valued indifferently, as to religious and moral ideal, *Ecclesiastes* and St. John, the book of *Esther* and the *Sermon on the Mount*; they all make selections out of the number and material of the biblical writings; they make these their points of departure; they assign values accordingly, mark preferences; they deny in fact and by their own example the rule which they formulate in theory. And it could not be otherwise, if it is true that the sacred collection contains books of unequal religious value and that in the New Testament, as in the Old, there are diverse types of teaching. How, then, could we

reproach theological science for doing what pious believers continually and unscrupulously practice, by virtue of a religious instinct or spiritual tact which breaks into pieces the doctrine of the whole, as applied to Holy Scripture in matters of faith and of dogma?

Is this an immediate declaration that if the notion of verbal inspiration is set aside the Bible loses all religious value and ceases to be an authority for us in matters of faith? By no means. It is not the authority itself which falls; the nature of the authority is modified.<sup>1</sup> After showing what Holy Scripture ought not to be and what it will not give to us, it is easy to point out the necessary and permanent rôle which pertains to it in the creation and the direction of the Protestant faith, consequently in the constitution and government of dogmatic science.

“The Bible is the witness which causes us to comprehend the Gospel.” The Gospel—that is to say, the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God on the earth, the revelation “of the divine holiness and love in their perfect harmony manifested in the light and in the entire activity of that One from whom our religion derives its name, Jesus Christ,”<sup>2</sup>—the Gospel is the essential con-

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. II, § I. The difference which it is necessary to bring to the foreground here has been strongly expressed by Raccaud: “We are the children of the Bible, not its slaves.”

<sup>2</sup> L. MONOD, *Le Problème de l’ autorité*, pp. 70, 101.

tent and inspiring soul of the Holy Scripture. The value of the latter consists in that it is the document of the history of a divine work which, continuing through the centuries, has brought to humanity, "according to a providential plan, especially revealed in Israel,"<sup>1</sup> the organs of a new life whose perfect development and supreme manifestation are found to be realized in Jesus Christ. This permanent and integral source of the Gospel furnishes to us a principle of spiritual criticism, a positive religious criterion, according to which we can value the books of the Holy Scripture, and discriminate, in each writing, between the fundamental and essential parts and the decrepit and transitory parts. "The proclamation of the Word of God, the proclamation of the Gospel of redemption, as a sovereign authority, puts into our hands a regulating principle; we have found the focus about which all the parts group themselves with a value proportionate to the approach of each part to this divine center."<sup>2</sup>

It is permissible to affirm that this method conforms to the very spirit of Protestantism and that it corresponds to the great religious affirmations of the spiritual followers of the evangelical church. Is it not, in a word, to put into practice the axiom of Luther, who made the canonicity of

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER, *Revue chrétienne*, Vol. I (1892), pp. 35-8, 253.

<sup>2</sup> L. MONOD, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

the biblical books depend upon their attitude to the person of Christ? "This is the true test for the valuation of all the books; whether they insist or not upon that which concerns Christ, since all Scripture must point us to Christ (Rom., Chap. 3), even as St. Paul (1 Cor., Chap. 2) did not wish to know anything except Christ. That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if Peter or Paul has said it; on the contrary, that which preaches Christ *is* apostolic, even if it should come from Judas, from Ananias, from Herod, or from Pilate."<sup>1</sup> One is able to make certain reservations as to the manner in which Luther has applied this principle, but it seems incontestable to us that Protestant theology will not go astray by returning with increasing clearness and decision to the position of the Reformer. What, then, is this postulate so vigorously formulated by theologians of very diverse tendencies, what is this postulate which makes Jesus Christ the foundation of the authority of the Scripture, if it is not a manifest return to the religious program of Luther?

This is, then, the element of truth contained in the formula of our ancient theologians: the Scripture is its own interpreter. In a word, the point of contact and the norm which we must choose for valuing the different parts of the

<sup>1</sup>*Vorrede auf die Ep. Jacobi.*

Bible we shall find in the Bible itself, in the living center of the Holy Scripture, in the person of Christ to whom the sacred books render testimony (John 5:39).

It is certain that this method of valuing and using the Bible robs it of the judicial and legal authority which the Jews attribute to the canon of the Old Dispensation. But it would be proof of a profound lack of intelligence or a mark of bad faith to maintain that the Holy Scripture, considered as the document of the divine revelation of which Jesus Christ is the perfect organ, loses its religious virtue and is deprived of the sovereign dignity which the Christian consciousness confers upon it.

We have indicated wherein resides authority in matters of faith for the evangelical Christian, hence, in what consists the norm of Protestant dogmatics. It remains to us to deduce clearly the solution implied in the preceding development, and to note precisely its complete meaning and essential characteristics.

### III.

What is the kernel of the debate as to the norm of Protestant dogmatics? It is the question of authority in matters of faith. Is there, for the Protestant, a religious authority? Where does it reside? How can it be established and be made legitimate?

Whether we have the courage to admit it, or do not dare to acknowledge it, in the discussion of this problem the point of departure is our own selves. This is true for the most authoritative traditionalist, for the most submissive Catholic. If we go to the bottom of the matter, if we analyze the mental and moral state of every man who obeys an authority, there is at the very foundation of his obedience, back of his acceptance of the rule to which he submits himself, an inner decision of the subject, a voluntary act of the individual. If I am a Roman Catholic, it means that among all the churches I accord to the church of Rome the exclusive right of dictating her laws to me. Why do I accord to her this right? It does not suffice for me to answer: "Because she has said it." For one would demand immediately how and why that word has had over me a supremacy which has conquered my belief and bound my will. It follows that subjectivism is the necessary point of departure and the permanent condition of all recognized and accepted authority.

That is true, in a narrower and higher sense, upon the ground where we place Protestantism. If inner and personal faith is the very soul of evangelical Christianity, it is easy to show that a new conception of spiritual authority flows from the religious principle of the Reformation.

That which characterizes the attitude and the principle of the Protestant is that the believer does not submit himself by virtue of a power foreign to that which proposes merely to constrain him; that the religious authority which would bend his will, inspire his heart, and enlighten his spirit needs to accredit itself and make itself legitimate to his spirit, to his heart, and to his will; that it shall not impose itself upon him by an external constraint, but shall recommend itself by its inner virtue. Far from borrowing its rights from an ally external to itself, it owes its efficacy and its evidence to itself alone—what shall I say?—it is an authority which itself creates, in him to whom it would extend, the confidence which it gives to him; in the presence of a superior reality which enters into his life his spirit feels itself solicited by a conquering force which subjugates and dominates it. To recognize authority is, for us Protestants, to be conscious of the profound affinity which maintains between authority and our consciousness; it is to confess that the authority has a right to bind us and that this obligation is for us at the same time freedom; it is to realize with perfect liberty, which is at the same time an absolute necessity, that to resist the power which would claim us is to belie our own nature.

Does there exist, in the eyes of the Protestant

Christian, an authority of this species? Is there a power whose spiritual control he accepts by virtue of an assent of himself to himself? Do we know a power in the presence of which apparent abdication proves to be, in reality, conquest, victory, and enrichment?

To these questions the Protestant can answer only by the affirmation of a decisive experience, constantly renewing itself, ever renewable.

The authority which acclaims itself to our consciousness and claims us, that which finds in us the most intimate contact and the most profound attachments, that which truly enters into our inner life andmingles itself with it to the extent of making itself an integral and organic part of us, is the Gospel; that is to say, not a testimony leaning upon its independent phenomena and invoking for its credibility an external validation of supernatural proofs, not a body of doctrines accessible to theoretical reason by way of logical demonstration and deduction, but the positive and practical manifestation of a new life entirely penetrated by holiness and love, the certain realization of a mercy as ardent to deliver the guilty as it is implacable in condemning the bad, the victorious incarnation of the power of God which saves the sinner (Rom. 1:16).

This power, in a word, this Gospel, which never originates in the heart of man, but which the

heart of man needs, the conquered and convinced sinner recognizes as the Word of God, the inspired message of deliverance and victory, the redemptive and sanctifying truth, revealing itself to the unfortunate and fallen soul, and satisfying it in all the depths and exigencies of its indestructible needs. If, in the light which discovers to him the depth of his misery and the infinite grace of a Savior, the Christian embraces the "good news" as the "Word of God," it is not upon the basis of a theory elaborated by the savants, nor upon faith in the official claims established by a church; it is because the power whose indisputable reality he has discovered raises him above himself, makes him conqueror of the world and of sin, and causes him to enter upon a life of holiness and love which has its source elsewhere than in the depths of the worldly and carnal life.

The Word of God, the Gospel, is a divine revelation, or rather the divine revelation *par excellence*, not an abstract doctrine capable of enriching the sum of our intellectual conceptions, but a creative power capable of freeing and renewing our souls. If it is true that sin is something other than a gap or an aberration in the intellect, if it is more than a deplorable error, if it overwhelms and degrades us as a malevolent power whose servitude we cannot break and whose

shame we cannot efface, then we realize that we have need, not only of being enlightened by a light from above, but still more, and above all, do we need to be pardoned, healed, transformed by a principle of eternal life. The true revelation is a resurrection from the dead, a new birth, a second creation in the midst of humanity.

“Gospel,” “Word of God,” “Revelation”—these are the sublime and blessed words which, in our school, have been necessarily reduced into formulas and dogmas, but of which it is necessary for us constantly to regain the inexhaustible riches and divine content, the demonstration of spirit and of power which does not suffice for our souls unless it overreaches them; the spiritual reality which we comprehend in the measure in which we abandon ourselves to its control; the sovereign law which the consciousness accepts as a “law of liberty”—such is religious authority in the evangelical and Protestant sense.

This authority has a name in history. Jesus of Nazareth has brought to us the Gospel or the Word of God; he has not announced it as a message independent of himself; he did not teach it as a doctrine foreign to his consciousness; he lived it in his life; he realized it in his person; he is himself its perfect revelation, its luminous and all-powerful manifestation. “Master, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of

eternal life, and we have believed and have known that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:68, 69; Matt. 16:16, 17). That spontaneous cry of the disciples' faith has traversed the centuries, resounding in the souls of all believers, attracting and soothing the troubled and overburdened conscience, awakening, in hearts thirsting for pardon and righteousness, profound and mysterious echoes. That is why Christ can dispense with official titles and external warrants. His authority rests upon a certitude which is born in the consciousness itself of those who give themselves to him; it neither commands nor imposes; it inspires; the soul adhering to it recognizes its true self and discovers its true nature and its immortal and divine destiny.

Can one say that this method of conceiving authority tends to weaken or deny it? That would be a strange mistake. How could he suppress authority who bases it, not on the fragile ground of unreliable proofs or upon the disputable titles of an external institution, but upon the profound and elemental foundation of consciousness, that is to say, upon the original and indestructible rock of humanity?

Or will one charge us with that oft-repeated reproach—"You allow subjectivism to enter; you open the door to individual and arbitrary sense; your pretended authority is a fiction, it is

you who constitute it, you yourselves are your own authority"? This is another misunderstanding which it will be easy to set aside, if we accept seriously the privilege which the Reformation confers upon us and the duty which it imposes upon us.

In effect, the faith which accepts and acknowledges religious authority is not the implicit faith of the Catholic; it is faith in the evangelical and Protestant meaning. Is it necessary to recall that this faith is an inner and personal decision, an affirmation of our spiritual and moral being, a consent of the subject to truth? Is it necessary to repeat that it is I myself who am called upon to believe and announce my belief to myself; that I cannot throw this obligation upon someone else; that upon this point my own responsibility alone is engaged; that the idea of belief by proxy is a contradiction and an impossibility?

Is this the subjectivism with which we are reproached? If it is, then we must bear the reproach; but shall we lament the fact? No, we must rejoice and be glad, for that subjectivism is the very heart of the Reformation; this so-called weakness is the very strength of Protestantism. To dissimulate, to disguise, to gloss over this elementary truth, this primordial fact, this essential condition of evangelical Protestantism, is to

dry up the sources of our religion ; it is to deny the principle from which we not only derive our life, but the very reason of our existence.

Moreover, if it is we who believe, we who judge, we who express ourselves, is that to say that the object of faith is of no importance ? Does that mean that it is permitted us to judge haphazard, that the manner in which we express ourselves may be indifferent ? God forbid. We wish to believe the truth, we wish to judge according to the truth, we wish to declare ourselves for the truth. But this truth is of a practical and moral order, and there is a second point which must always be emphasized, because it is always forgotten. If there are serious and earnest Protestants who have any difficulty in conceiving the notion and the rôle of religious authority, is it not because they have so much difficulty in establishing it on moral and practical ground ? One insists on thinking that the moral certitude is less than material or scientific certitude ; one confuses the three orders of greatness so admirably defined and distinguished by Pascal ; one imagines that an authority which lays claim to the conscience only could not be an absolute authority ; one would wish to establish it, if not by material constraint, at least theoretically by the aid of the syllogism, or historically by the aid of testimony.

Vain efforts! "That is impossible, for it [moral certitude] is of another order."

This truth which makes believers and which is accessible only to believers, the fact which gives life to faith and which is comprehended by faith, that is precisely the Gospel, the Word of God, the divine revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not my personal experience which makes the Gospel and which creates authority; on the contrary, it is the Gospel which, rising on the horizon of my history, entering into the sphere of my soul, penetrating to the very center of my life, determines, by its influence and its intrinsic force, an inner and decisive crisis by virtue of which I decide, believe, obey, <sup>and</sup> love, surrender. Without this divine Word which has awakened my soul, I should continue to sleep my sleep, troubled perhaps by prophetic dreams, but a sleep always overwhelming and at last fatal. On the other hand, it is true the Gospel remains for me a closed or dead letter if I do not assimilate to myself its divine content by a voluntary and free act, solicited, made possible, realized within me by means of that same Gospel which frees me while it enslaves me, and which guarantees my independence while creating my submission.

We are here at the mysterious center of the work, at once divine and human, which appeals

to faith. It is not exact to say that outside of this experience the Gospel does not exist, but it is necessary to affirm that for him who has not had this experience the Gospel vanishes and remains incomprehensible. Our experience does not make truth, but it does make it our own; it does not produce religious authority, but it does give to it its hold upon our consciousness and submits our inner life to it.

If I have succeeded in making myself understood, I cannot be accused of resolving the realities of the Gospel into subjective phenomena and of defining religious authority fancifully. That which saves us from this error is knowledge of evangelical and Protestant faith; if that frees us from the servitude of a statutory and legal authority, it also cures us of a self-conceit which nourishes itself upon its own substance.

Faith is awakened in us by the divine factor of the Gospel, but, in order to live, sustain, and strengthen itself, it must invariably lean upon the power which has produced it. Subject to constant failures, assailed by doubt and sin, exposed to ironical and cruel contradictions, which the experience of each day opposes to it, what would become of our faith if it reposed upon itself alone? In order to affirm, in spite of all these obstacles and contradictions, the incorruptible holiness and infinite love of the heavenly Father,

it appeals to the divine token of that love and that holiness ; it assures itself by the evangelical revelation which makes it possible to hope against hope ; it draws from the work and person of Christ the motives of a trust which places the world beneath its feet (1 John 5:4); it maintains itself and nourishes itself by the religious testimony which comes to the aid of our weakness and triumphs over our incredulity. Without the gracious initiative of the divine love revealed and made certain by the Savior, faith could not be born ; without the continued operation of that love, which is assured to us by that One who is the same yesterday, today, forever, faith could not subsist and grow. The Gospel is not only the original agent of our spiritual life, it is also its permanent foundation ; Jesus Christ is in every way the beginner and the finisher of faith.

May we, then, be saved from the refined spiritualism which invites us to free ourselves progressively from that One who would be only its great initiator, whose part, once completed, would become superfluous ! Away with those who rally around the famous dictum of philosophy, maintaining that the work of Christ has become useless, and who would be happy to see his name forgotten and lost in the glory of the Father !<sup>1</sup> We repudiate this assertion, which could

<sup>1</sup>FICHTE, *Anweisung zum seligen Leben* (Vol. V, p. 485, complete works.)

only be a dangerous illusion or a fatal misunderstanding. Do they wish by such advice to invite us to sacrifice the entire official and external title in favor of the divine mission of the Savior? Do they not expect us to remember that the word of Christ finds a direct point of contact in our hearts, and that his authority is firmly imbedded in our consciousness? Nothing is more true, more evangelical, or more Christian. Do they pretend, on the contrary, that we shall come to dispense with Christ according as we shall be more advanced in the inner and spiritual experience of Christianity? Nothing is more false, more chimerical, or more perilous. In a word, what is spiritual and inner Christianity if it is not filial confidence in the all-powerful and perfectly holy love of the heavenly Father? Remove the proof and the token of that love, what will become of our confidence? A frail reed which a vapor, a drop of water, can destroy, and the universe will conspire to crush it. Down, then, with the terms of your specious reasoning! Instead of repeating, "The more spiritually elevated we become, the more shall we approach freedom from the tutelage of the Master," affirm with joyous and grateful assurance: "The more we advance in faith and in the knowledge of the truth, the more shall we enter into communion with Him who is for us the truth and who cre-

ates and increases our faith ; the more shall we make his work the foundation of our confidence and his word the balm of our life." No, the Holy Spirit, living within the souls of believers, does not separate them from Christ; it renders testimony to him ; it glorifies him ; it causes him to reign and increase ; it stamps indelibly upon their consciousness the divine right of his abiding authority.<sup>1</sup> Break the bond which binds the Christian to Christ and to his Gospel, and you tear the truth from his soul by the roots ; you break the unity of his moral life ; you mutilate his consciousness.

I have tried to define the religious authority implied in the Protestant and evangelical notion of faith. In what does that authority consist ? What is its foundation ? These are vital questions, not to be dissociated from another problem which is their necessary correlative : Upon what foundation do our faith and Christian certitude rest ?

If the solution which I have attempted to set forth and defend corresponds to the truth, then each evangelical Christian should be in a position to test it and verify its correctness by his own personal experience. The facts analyzed are not of an exceptional character ; on the contrary, they are the common inheritance of every believ-

<sup>1</sup> John 16:13-15; 15:26, 27; Rom. 8: 16, 26, 27.

ing and earnest Protestant; they constitute the inner and permanent source of his religious life. The Word of God revealing its divine origin in the effects which it produces in the hearts of believers; the Gospel legitimizing itself to the consciousness which recognizes in it the supreme good toward which it aspires and for which it is created; Jesus Christ accepted and followed by the soul whose confidence he wins and eternally justifies—is not this the central kernel of Protestantism? Is not this the inspiring soul of evangelical faith and the Christian life?

The condition of the Protestant theologian is not different from that of believers; an evangelical Christian, he has not fared otherwise than his brothers; there is for him no other Christian authority than for each of the members of the church; he does not know, he cannot know, any different way of arriving at the certitude of faith or of establishing the character and rights of the Gospel.

What, then, is his mission and his rôle? His duty is limited to a translation of the testimony and the content of the faith which he shares with his brothers. His mission consists in making himself the faithful and consistent interpreter of the experiences of which the Gospel is the author and the object. If my efforts in this regard are not without fruit, it will be understood that the

religious authority of evangelical faith constitutes at the same time the norm of Protestant dogmatics. Dogmatic science in the Protestant church has no other rule than the Gospel or the Word of God revealed and realized by Jesus Christ.

However, this answer, proof of which I have tried to furnish, raises new questions. Dogmatics is a science; the Gospel has neither the pretension nor the marks of a science. Dogmatics aspires to establish a system; nothing is less systematic than the Christian revelation. Dogmatics tries to translate into formulas the affirmations of the Christian consciousness; Jesus has neither prescribed formulas nor promulgated dogmas. Is there not, then, an absolute incompatibility and irreducible contradiction between dogmatic science and the norm that we have just established? How shall we draw from the evangelical revelation, announced by Christ and incarnated in his person, a rule governing the constitution of the science of faith? How shall we apply the norm of faith to the elaboration of dogmatics?\*

To ask these questions is to announce a new problem which we must proceed to examine, the problem of the method of Protestant dogmatics.

\* A great number of theologians, of most opposed points of view and most diverse schools, seem to agree upon this point: the religious authority of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE METHOD OF PROTESTANT DOGMATICS.

I. *Elimination of methods incompatible with the religious principle of Protestant dogmatics.*—(1). *The method of authority.*—Catholicism and Protestant orthodoxy.—Results of abandoning the doctrine of verbal inspiration.—The organic method substituted for the atomistic method in the dogmatic use of the Scripture.—The necessity of separating the constitutive elements of the Christian faith and the secondary explanations of theological reflection.—(2). *The speculative method.*—In what sense has speculation a legitimate part in dogmatics?—*A priori* speculation and rational deduction.—Condemnation of this method: it does not recognize the subjective and practical character of religious knowledge; it does not take account of the facts of evangelical revelation and of the experiences of the Christian consciousness; it does not take into account the existence and the interest of the church; it is in contradiction to the religious principle of Protestantism and the tradition inaugurated by our Reformers.

II. *Attempt at a positive solution.*—Statement of the question: How shall we deduce the evangelical revelation, the material and norm of Protestant dogmatics, from the biblical books, the documents of the Gospel of Christ?—Nature and limits of the evangelical revelation: It pertains only to the concrete relations of the moral and religious life.—Corollaries of this principle: the source of religious experience and the form of dogmatic explanation.—Application of this distinction to the theology of the New Testament: examples borrowed from the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ.—Characteristics and value of the dogmatic proof drawn from the Holy Scripture.—Meaning and extent of the experimental method in dogmatics.

III. *The sciences auxiliary to Protestant dogmatics and its place in the circle of theological disciplines.*—Program of this discussion: we must start out from incontestable facts in order to examine the

points at issue.— The Protestant dogmatician needs the help and the support of biblical theology and of historical theology (history of dogma, symbolism, history of theology).— Protestant dogmatics and practical theology.— The problem of the relationship of dogmatics to ethics.— The problem of the relationship of dogmatics to philosophy: autonomy of the Reformer with regard to the latter; meaning of this formula.— The indifference of the Protestant dogmatician to forbidden and impossible philosophical material.— Impossibility of constructing a theological system without basing it upon the foundation of a theory of knowledge; presuppositions and demands of such a theory.— The importance of the philosophy of Kant for the Protestant theologian; nature and limits of this importance.— Protestant dogmatics and the philosophy of religion.— Protestant dogmatics and Christian apologetics; conditions and limitations of apologetics.— Apologetic character of Protestant dogmatics.— Transition to the last chapter of this work: The organism of Protestant dogmatics.

## I.

WE will not stop long to combat the methods irreconcilable with our premises and to justify in detail the motives of such an exclusion. A few observations will suffice.

1. The method of authority practiced by Catholic scholasticism or Protestant orthodoxy has but a few rigorously consistent defenders among the theologians who are the partisans of the Reformation. Catholic theology, receiving the truth from the hands of an infallible church, could have no other mission than to demonstrate these traditional dogmas, in so far as is possible, and laboriously to reduce them into a system in which artificial logic takes the place of living

unity. In breaking with the notion of an infallible church, Protestant theology has deprived itself of the right and the means of proceeding after the fashion of the doctors of the Roman church. The confessions of faith of evangelical communities neither pretend nor are able to establish a theological tradition having the force of law in the Protestant church. The method of authority, conceived in the sense which Roman theology attaches to it, is radically incompatible with the fundamental principles of faith and of Protestant dogmatics.

Repulsed from the ground of official creeds and judicial obligations, the method of authority presents itself to us in another aspect in the churches born of the Revival. It took refuge behind the intrenchments of the biblical canon, and it renewed its life and its power under the form of verbal and external inspiration. I have already indicated the reasons why this point of view appears inadmissible.\* Hence it would be useless to return to it, if we were not daily witnesses of that contradiction which, on this point, exists in many spirits and creates disorder in the camp of Protestant theology.

There are very few theologians who, in theory, dare to support the doctrine of the literal inspiration of the Scripture; on the contrary, some

\*Chap. V, §2.

attain a certain affectation in proclaiming loudly that they have victoriously broken away from the mechanical and magical conception of verbal inspiration, and they complacently do themselves honor for this act of courageous independence. If, however, it comes to drawing resolutely the results of these premises, immediately they recede, hesitate, compromise, finally return to the old rut, and remain bound by the tradition which they had repudiated with so much noise and secular activity.

They always act, in sermons, in catechetical teaching, and even in theological teaching, as if they still held the Bible as an infallible code, and they continue to practice the method of authority although the principle of this external authority has long since founded. There is a contradiction and a fatal incoherence in our Protestant evangelical dogmatics. There is no possible development of the position of the evangelical theologian who incorporates in dogmatics the theory of verbal inspiration which he himself has very frequently destroyed utterly by his criticism or his exegesis.<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to these inconsistencies and contradictions, it is necessary to repeat that the desertion of verbal inspiration involves a complete modification of the nature of dogmatic proof drawn from the Scriptures. The Bible ceases to be for us a collection of *loci classici* cal-

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER, *Annales de bibliographie théologique*, 1889, p. 146.

culated to prop up the doctrinal decisions of the church; the Christian character of a dogma is not founded upon the testimony of a word torn from its context. One would deceive himself very strangely if he imagined that an enumeration of scriptural passages, or a very imposing accumulation of *dicta probantia*, would suffice to constitute an evangelical and Protestant dogma. As to particular passages, it would be necessary first to determine their precise origin; their exact and complete meaning; their general import in the whole teaching of their authors. Nay, if verbal inspiration is to be rejected, if it mingles human elements with the divine factors which have controlled the formation of biblical ideas, it is necessary to find out whether these notions form an integral part of the Christian revelation or are only a secondary product of the thought of the sacred authors. Moreover, one cannot free himself from the task, as difficult as it is necessary, of choosing between the permanent foundation of Christian truth and the transient and variable forms of theological explanation. In other words, for the atomistic method which heaps up, pell-mell, isolated quotations, it is necessary to substitute the organic method which reproduces the historical meaning and comprehends the living and inner inspiration of the sacred documents. One is singularly mistaken if he imagines

that he is rendering homage to the authority and the dignity of the Scriptures when he does away with the generative idea and the organic integrity of biblical development. In disjoining the chain of theoretical demonstration, or in breaking up the thread of practical exhortation in order to attach himself separately to each of the elements obtained by this rash dissolution, one not only warps the general meaning of the text; he also disfigures the precise meaning of each of its parts. The childish naïveté with which one sometimes flatters himself for establishing the biblical validity of a doctrine by means of a fragmentary quotation of the Bible is one of the most fatal heritages of ancient orthodoxy and of the theory of the mechanical inspiration of the Scriptures, which our Protestantism has had so much trouble to get rid of, to the great detriment of both faith and science.

If the dogmatician is authorized to make use of only the essential and constitutive ideas of the Christian revelation, if he does not allow himself to attach the same dogmatic value to the immediate affirmations of faith and to the explanations derived from theology, how shall he make his choice between the two? Our former researches have already prepared the answer to that question; nor can it be more than merely indicated here. We shall return to it later in the

attempt to furnish a positive solution of the problem of dogmatic method. It is sufficient, for the moment, to discard the method of authority, under the double form with which Catholic theology and Protestant orthodoxy have stamped it. "Authority," Schérer has said, "is like the thread which holds together all the beads of a rosary. When the thread is broken the beads no longer have a bond, they fall to the ground; in vain will you search to regain them; you must make the best of it, you will never find them all again."<sup>1</sup> You will find them, we dare to say, by slightly modifying the figure of the eminent critic; you will find them, but renewed and transformed, still capable of rendering, under this form, services valuable beyond expectation.

2. At the antipodes of the method of authority there is another method which we must discard not the less resolutely: it is the speculative method. While eliminating it without hesitation and declaring it incapable of performing the task imposed upon Protestant dogmatics, it is well to prevent all misunderstanding; it is necessary to avoid, above all, any equivocation which might run the risk of warping, from the very beginning, our point of view and entangling the question instead of elucidating it.

<sup>1</sup> *Mélanges d'histoire religieuse*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1865), Introd. p. iv.

Is it understood that the speculative method is the mere antithesis of empiricism? In that sense, it is very evident that it constitutes a large part of dogmatic science. Empiricism reduces all knowledge to the comprehension of the particular fact which falls directly under the observation of the intellect or under the perception of the sense organs. If the particular and contingent fact alone can be affirmed, if it alone is real and demonstrable, every science resolves itself into a collection of particular experiences which it will be possible to unite as a whole, but which cannot have between themselves any organic bond, because general and universal laws do not exist. In other words, empiricism is equivalent to the negation of all science. If empiricism were right, the experimental sciences would be as impossible as other sciences.

Without doubt, the real, actual facts are, above all, that by which we are able to perceive everything that is accessible to our minds; perception of the facts, that is, experience, is the point of departure for every science. Within these limits, empiricism is right. But to wish to limit itself to this point of departure, to imprison the human spirit within this small circle, is folly and absurdity; it is to deny gratuitously the legitimacy of all our intellectual operations which stand upon the facts in order to over-reach them and discover general and universal truths; it is to deny the value, the validity, and the sphere of reason.\*

\* RIAUX, "Empirisme," in FRANCK's *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1875), p. 443.

Now, this sphere of reason, this function of the intelligence which overreaches the particular and contingent fact, which raises itself from the accidental to the necessary, has frequently been designated by the general name of speculation; that is to say, speculation, taken in this very large sense, has a part in the formation of all sciences, experimental as well as rational. Experience gives the particular, speculation seeks and discovers in it the general, and it is this discovery which raises the data of experience to the level of a science. Induction, which is the passage from the particular to the general, is therefore the first step in speculative reason. Thus no science could establish and complete itself without speculation. In order to merit the name, science must fill the sphere which belongs to it; it must have an independent method which will free it from all external authority, an organizing principle which brings into unity the facts and particular notions, and gives to them the coherence of a system. Research for causes, for laws, for the generative principle, belongs to speculation.

If this is true, it is clear that Protestant dogmatics could not dispense with speculation. Dogmatics has for its source faith, the product of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and for its norm the Gospel, of which the New Testament

is the classical document. But investigation of the relations which maintain between the constitutive elements of the Christian faith, the determination of the laws which these relations imply, the synthesis which arises to a view of the whole, are the tasks which overreach the limited circle of observation and experience, and they could not be resolved into purely empirical functions. Defined in these terms, the speculative method is not only legitimate; it is indispensable to the normal activity of dogmatic science.

However, that is not the ordinary signification which, in the history of theology, attaches to speculation and to the speculative method. That term is generally reserved for the undertaking of philosophers or theologians, who, instead of taking their point of departure from the facts, proceed *a priori* without taking account of observation and experience. That *a priori* deductive process, descending from the absolute and universal to the relative and particular, is the more chimerical and dangerous the more resolutely it insists upon challenging the supreme jurisdiction of the facts.

Even admitting that one had the happy faculty of positing for his point of departure a large and fruitful truth, that would not save it from being hypothetical in character, since it would not rest upon reality; as a last result, he who would accept it must resign himself to eter-

nal ignorance of its demonstration, hence must deprive his concepts of the very character which constitutes science, certitude.<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt, it may happen that speculative reason, like genius, may divine by immediate intuition what experience discovers only step by step; but still it is necessary that these oracles thus given—precisely because they are immediate and after a fashion straight from heaven—should be sanctioned by a work of experimental verification, and, if need be, by rectifying critique, in order to have the force of law in the realm of science.

Condemnable in philosophy, the speculative method thus conceived is still more inadmissible to the ground of dogmatic science.

Its first error consists in not recognizing the subjective and practical character of religious knowledge. The speculative method tends to make of this knowledge a theoretical, objective function, independent of the inner decisions and disposition of the subject; it suppresses or ignores the real nature of faith, an eminently personal and moral act; it does not know how to distinguish clearly between the religious certitude which is imbedded in consciousness and the scientific certitude which has intellectual evidence for its foundation; it forgets that "God is not a

<sup>1</sup> RIAUX, *op. cit.*

phenomenon which one may observe outside of himself, nor a truth demonstrable by purely logical reasoning ;<sup>15</sup> it tries to resolve Christianity into a science of the absolute, a revealed metaphysic according to some, a natural metaphysic according to others ; it compromises immediately the autonomy of faith and of the Christian life, and finishes up by destroying it.

At the same time it causes Christian theology to deviate from the line which Christ himself traced for the faith of his disciples. In effect, if it is true that faith comes from preaching and that preaching has for its content the Gospel, that is to say, the positive work and living personality of the Savior, it should be recognized that the speculative method which proceeds *a priori* is the precise opposite of faith, since it does away with the facts and experiences of the Christian revelation. The method which we oppose presupposes and implies with more or less clearness and consistency that Christianity is essentially an idea ; it imposes upon theology the task of separating this idea from the sensible envelope and popular symbols which clothe it. It may be recalled how Hegelianism has conceived and practiced this method. That which religion teaches under the

<sup>15</sup> SABATIER, "Essai d'une théorie critique de la connaissance religieuse," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 1893, p. 215; *Revue chrétienne*, Vol. II (1893), p524.

concrete form of dogma or of cult, philosophy translates into pure ideas, and thus raises it into a superior realm more conformable to the inner nature of spirit. Starting from these premises, the Hegelian Right pretended to preserve the biblical teaching, even to recognized ecclesiastical doctrines, but interpreting them in their philosophical and profound meaning; it thought it had found in metaphysics the keystone of the mysteries of Christianity and thus had reconciled forever the Gospel and the modern spirit. We know with what pitiless irony Strauss unveiled the fictitious character and deplorable sterility of that attempt at the restoration of orthodoxy by means of speculation; from the Hegelian principles he drew diametrically opposite conclusions; that which, according to him, remains of each dogma after its progressive formation and its fatal dissolution through the centuries is a pale residue, an abstract idea, the integral element of a system of speculative pantheism. The *enfants terribles* of the Hegelian Left sought to destroy the illusion of that golden age, which was to see consummated the indissoluble union of philosophy and Christianity and "inaugurate a new era during which the wolves would live with the lambs and the leopards with the ewes."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> STRAUSS, *Die christliche glaubenslehre, etc.* (1840-41), Vol. II. p. 1.

If the leaders of the speculative method do not take account of the subjective and practical character of the religious consciousness, if they forget that Christianity is a spiritual reality which has manifested itself in history and has been incarnated in a Person, they commit yet another error of a piece with the foregoing ; they abandon the ground of the Christian community and do not do justice to the interests and most imperious exigencies of the church. They come dangerously near to establishing a false and fatal hierarchy between the faith of the simple believer and the speculative reflection of the thinker. The former is only a provisional stage on the route which leads to perfect truth ; it is only a lower round of the ladder which mounts to the Absolute. That is the old distinction which the Gnostics borrowed from ancient philosophy or from pagan religions, and which the Christianity of Jesus and of Paul has justly destroyed by opening the Kingdom of God, not to the proud wisdom of the learned, but to the simplicity of heart and happy confidence of children. Thus it is necessary to reject absolutely every theological method and system which tends to obscure these fundamental truths and which raises the false and dangerous fiction of an esoteric doctrine for the use of the initiated and an exoteric doctrine good only for the common

people. Nothing is more contrary to the essence of the Gospel and to the religious principle of primitive Protestantism.

In a word, the method accepted by the speculative schools, orthodox or heretical, is in flagrant contradiction to the tradition followed by our Reformers. Doubtless, not one of the latter elaborated a theory of knowledge or developed *ex professo* the principles of a dogmatic methodology; but, in default of a program, they left us their example, and it is above all by their example that they condemn rational speculation applied to the Christian faith. From their constant practice it is possible to deduce the clear and fruitful indications of the course followed in their treatment of dogmatic problems. Let it suffice to recall, by way of example, the declarations of Luther as to the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, and also his sarcastic and undignified polemic against the rational deductions of the scholastics of the Middle Ages. How it scorns and opposes the adventurous attempts of the modern sophists who carry on their rash investigations upon "God in himself," upon the eternal essence of the Son prior to his manifestation in the flesh, and upon the unfathomable mysteries of the divine Trinity! The proud curiosity of these imprudent people who disdain the way traced by God himself is not less condemnable

than the folly of the architect who imagined that he could construct the roof of his building before he had laid the foundation. Like the angel of light who was involved in irreparable ruin by his insane and culpable presumption, these unhappy ones, led astray by the meanderings of speculative dreams, expose themselves to terrible calamities and rush fatally to their ruin. In the warnings which Luther addressed to those whom he would hold back from the precipice the most bitter irony is mingled with the most solemn adjurations, but the dominating emphasis, the fundamental note, of all these words has in it something of tragedy, a remnant of which still vibrates in the intellectual and moral temptations whose fatal and unconquerable encroachment the Reformer himself felt.

I will gather up and try to indicate precisely our conclusions as to the speculative method as applied to Protestant dogmatics. That method we accept and wish to practice, if by it is meant what we stated at the beginning of our critical exposition, that is to say, if we attempt merely to comprehend the Protestant doctrine in its inner origin and in its living unity, to consider each of the Christian truths in the light of a generative and controlling principle, or rather of a primordial and final fact, the Gospel of salvation, incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, and be-

coming, by the Holy Spirit, immanent in the consciousness of the believer. But we condemn and reject the speculative method, if by it is meant the purely formal method of Spinozistic or Hegelian *a-priorism*, rational deduction, or idealistic metaphysics which identifies the categories of being with the laws of thought and transforms into objective and creative realities the subjective concepts or the logical operations of the intellect. Such a method denies the essential conditions of religious knowledge, and hence of dogmatic science; it is contrary to the most manifest intentions and to the supreme aim of the Christian revelation; it is unfaithful to the program which the vital principle of the Protestant church and the inspiring spirit of the theology of our Reformers imply and demand.

The authoritative and speculative methods have sometimes been combined with or have yielded to truths which it is not necessary to mention here. They fall before either one of our critical tests, and sometimes before both.

## II.

We have discarded the methods incompatible with the religious principle of evangelical Protestantism. We must now determine in a positive manner the method which the task of Protestant dogmatics, properly understood, implies and demands.

How shall we be able to obtain from the biblical documents the Gospel or the Word of God revealed and realized in Jesus Christ and laying hold upon the consciousness of the believer?

The answer to this question would not seem difficult to anyone who knows how to draw resolutely the conclusions involved in the Christian and Protestant notion of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

We have stated above,<sup>1</sup> and it is necessary to repeat here, that this revelation is not an abstract idea; it is the manifestation of a creative and redemptive power, a decisive virtue which, from the consciousness of Jesus, where it reigns in all its fulness, has spread everywhere into the hearts opened to the benign influence which emanates from that mysterious force. The good seed, thrown into well-prepared ground, has become a vigorous tree, sheltering all those who seek refuge under its branches. Thus the content of this revelation does not consist in a system of supernatural notions and inspired doctrines; the living center, the luminous focus, of the Gospel is the inner and immediate sense of divine sonship, which is the inspired essence of the self-consciousness of Jesus, the primitive and indestructible experience of his spiritual life, the immovable

<sup>1</sup>Chap. V, § III.

and permanent principle of his religious testimony and his messianic ministry. That experience, prepared in history by the progressive education to which God submitted humanity, appeared among the people of Israel in Jesus of Nazareth "in the fulness of time," and was propagated in the consciousness of the apostles, who were its first witnesses and faithful interpreters. The succeeding generations have been, with regard to the great creative and redemptive facts of the historical appearance of Jesus, in a relationship of dependence which is not limited to the external bond of remembrance or of tradition. Life produces life, and it is only when this spirit which constituted the very personality of Christ comes to its unfolding in the heart of man that there is born the new creature called "the Christian."

This living, spiritual, eminently religious and evangelical conception of revelation tends to gather about it an ever-increasing number of spirits, and it is permissible to affirm that in the end it will prevail. It has been expressed by one of the masters of contemporary theology, with admirable vigor and clearness, in a page which the reader will be grateful to me for quoting :

The capital point, where the activity of the Spirit of God is truly necessary, is that we shall undergo a new

experience, that there shall be created in us the beginning of a life. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. No one can help us by giving us an abstract idea in addition, but rather by reviving us. Modify first my inner life, my concrete relationship to God, I myself will then take care to modify accordingly my theology. From this point of view one will comprehend immediately that the veritable Word of God is not a catalogue of dogmas, that is to say, of superhuman abstract truth; for that would reduce this Word to a simple *flatus vocis* or to a simple *γράμμα*, to a dead and vain letter. The Word of God is essentially creative. It said, "Let there be light," and there was light. That is to say that it makes real what it proclaims, and it proclaims in realizing. That is true of the physical creation; it is just as true of the moral creation. Since, in fact, religious truth is nothing without the religious life, God never gives one without causing the other to appear. Thus, wishing to save us, he did not stop with a dogmatic definition of the normal relationship between ourselves and him. He has done more and better; He has created and has caused to be born, in the midst of humanity, Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and has placed that consciousness of the Son of God in history and in humanity as a germ, as a power of life capable of bringing forth life like itself. Likewise, wishing to enlighten Israel, God raised up among that people a series of prophetic consciousnesses, in such a manner that it is in the appearance of these luminous and shining souls, and not elsewhere, that one must search for the revelation of God in the Old Testament. Thus the absolute revelation of God is the absolute consciousness of Jesus Christ in which there is perfectly realized, under the form of a concrete life, the normal relationship between man and the heavenly Father who is manifested to him. We conclude, therefore, that the posi-

tive essence of revelation is not in any kind of dogma, but in the creation and production of a perfect religious life in the midst of humanity.\*

If the New Testament constitutes the document of revelation, if it translates its testimony and relates its history, the course to be followed in order to find in the Gospel the substance of Christian and Protestant dogma should not be doubtful. The historical method is the only one which answers to the real nature of the problem for which we are trying to find a solution.

Some observations upon the application of this method will not be out of place.

It is very evident that the divine revelation centers in the sphere of consciousness, and that it pertains only to the concrete relationships of the moral and religious life. That is to say that at one stroke is eliminated a series of questions which too often have been incorporated in the scientific expression of the Christian faith and have been introduced as integral elements into the traditional dogma. All the world today agrees that the Bible does not pretend in any manner to teach us lessons of cosmography, of geology, or of natural history ; but we forget this very fundamental principle as soon as it is necessary to put it into practice and translate it into

\*SABATIER, "Le Nouveau Testament contient-il des dogmes?" *Revue chrétienne*, Vol. I (1892), pp. 36, 37.

statements of fact. How many times, in formulating the ideas of creation, of providence, of the supernatural, in drawing the picture of the future destinies of humanity, in elaborating our cosmology and eschatology, have we effaced or ignored the line of demarkation which we had so conscientiously drawn! We indulge in excursions into domains from which we had excluded ourselves; we congratulate ourselves on the secret harmonies which we hope to find between the laws of the spirit and the laws of nature!

Is it necessary to give some precise examples? Someone has affirmed that the only important thing in the biblical account of creation is the great religious fact, but has none the less pointed out with complaisance "the striking facts which show us how the discoveries of science have come to throw unexpected light upon certain obscure passages of the first chapter of Genesis."<sup>1</sup>

Someone teaches that miracle is a religious notion accessible to faith alone, and upon which scientific experimentation has no hold; but, in spite of this affirmation, he seeks to determine theoretically the conditions of the birth of Jesus or the nature of the body of the resurrected and glorified Savior. One concedes voluntarily that in matters of medical science Jesus did not possess any supernatural knowledge, and yet does not

<sup>1</sup> BONIFAS, *Revue théologique de Montauban*, 1874-75, p. 238.

blink at drawing a whole system of demonology from some of the scriptural accounts concerning the cure of an epileptic or a maniac. Nothing is more frequent than the inconsistencies which misapprehend the exclusively religious character of the evangelical revelation and which tend to confound disastrously the practical knowledge of the believing subject and the theoretical function of science.

It is equally necessary to class in the "domain of human fallibility," and, consequently, take from the religious jurisdiction of the Gospel, the literary and critical opinions of Jesus relative to the books of the Old Testament, and, in general, all that belongs to the domain of the history made sacred by the national tradition of the Israelites. It does not suffice, then, to assure us that we are not obliged to believe, with Jesus and like him, in the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch, in the Davidic origin of the 110th psalm, in the complete historicity of the book of Daniel; it is necessary to go to the bottom of this affirmation. If the religious authority of Jesus is limited to the spiritual experiences which he would communicate to the consciousness of his followers, it would be to displace and to abuse the authority of the name of Christ to collect, out of the declarations of the Master, the *dicta probantia* as proof of some particular theory of revelation and inspiration.

Jesus had neither the pretension nor the mission of explaining to us the mode of the origin of the sacred books; of giving to us an account of the species of influence exercised by the Holy Spirit on the spirit of man; of uniting the religious truths which he affirms with the hypotheses set forth on the subject of these truths. Has criticism succeeded in really establishing the mythical character of the fall or of the traditions relative to the patriarchs? We shall be charged with challenging the results of science by stating that Jesus, like the apostle Paul, like the ancient church, believed in the historical reality of the traditional figures of Adam and Eve, of Abraham and Isaac, of Jacob and his sons.

Is this all that should be said with reference to the words of Jesus and the sacred writers? No. The limit within which the Gospel is contained, the living and permanent material of Christian and Protestant dogma, should be more precisely defined and more closely considered. The work of concentration to which the dogmatic canon, as we have tried to establish it above, invites us, implies still other principles and new corollaries which flow logically from our premises. It is not possible nor permissible to declare that the conceptions and formulas which the Master and his disciples borrowed from their contemporaries as the vehicles of the fruitful

germ of the divine truth, the creative and redemptive power of the Gospel, are eternal and unchangeable. The sense of divine sonship affirmed and expressed itself in the consciousness of Christ under the form of Hebrew and Jewish messianism, which served, not as the accidental and casual envelope, but as the necessary vehicle for the religious thought of Jesus. If it is certain that we cannot historically separate the messianic kingdom from the person of its founder, must we then conclude that for the Christian of today the title and the idea of the Messiah, the theocratic functions which he assumed, the apocalyptic hopes which attached to his work, have an absolute and eternal value ? Is there not every evidence that the Christian faith instinctively sloughs off the temporary and local husks in order to possess and nourish itself upon the religious substance which they contain ? It pierces through the outer envelope to the kernel within. In proceeding thus it merely obeys the impulse which comes from Christ himself.

The foundation of the consciousness of Jesus consists, in the last analysis, in the sense of divine sonship which constituted the power and the joy of his spirit from the very first. That was not for him a dogma ; it was a moral experience of his life. It is this feeling which at once takes him above the law and makes him announce a new covenant of God with men. It is this feeling which spiritualizes and transforms naturally the idea of the messianic

kingdom and of the Messiah himself, and which has become the specific character of the new religion. But here, also, Jesus separated himself in appearance from the rest of humanity only in order to raise it to himself. He not only called God "my Father," but "our Father," "your Father;" upon this recognition of God as Father, upon the new sense of this divine sonship, he built all the new life of his disciples. He did better and more than to formulate a theory; by his word and by communion with his person he created in their souls this new feeling; he gives to others that which he fully possesses in himself. In this manner the profoundest point in his inner life becomes the summit of his revelation; it is the foundation of the Gospel which has changed the world.<sup>1</sup>

That which we have called the religious experience of Jesus is applied in a large measure also to the faith of his apostles and first disciples. "In the authentic discourses of Jesus, the creative and revealing principle appears united to the most elementary and consequently the most durable ideas."<sup>2</sup> This is not equally so in the different doctrinal types of the "theology of the New Testament;" with the primitive language of the religious consciousness there is always mingled the secondary expression of dogmatic reflection. Sometimes the new faith takes the form of popular or rabbinical hermeneutics in order to justify its religious affirmations, and uses to this

<sup>1</sup>SABATIER, "Jésus Christ," in *L'Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses*, Vol. VII (Paris, 1890), p. 395.

<sup>2</sup>SABATIER, *De la vie intime des dogmes*, p. 13.

end exegetical arguments which may seem decisive and true at the time, but which, for us, are deprived of all approved forcefulness. Sometimes the Christian consciousness took the form of the speculative formulas which were current in the schools and translated its inner experiences into language acceptable to Hellenic genius. Jews and Greeks borrowed from the patrimony of their intellectual culture and their theological tradition auxiliary theses and explanatory corollaries in order to expound and develop the content of their Christian faith. It is therefore a complete misunderstanding of the religious meaning and real import of the faith itself to identify the foundation of religious experience with the form of theological argumentation. It is no more legitimate to raise the metaphysical formulas scattered through the New Testament to the height of dogmatic principles than it is to canonize the exegesis of the apostles—an exegesis as interesting from the religious point of view as it is arbitrary from the point of view of the historian. There is a striking analogy between the process of the interpretation of Scripture by exegesis and the process of metaphysical justification by speculation. It is manifestly inconsistent to dispose flippantly of the hermeneutics of Paul, of Matthew, or of the epistle to the Hebrews, but retain at any price the speculative formulas of the

fourth gospel. The Alexandrian Gnosis, as well as the rabbinical exegesis or popular hermeneutics, is only an external support which the Christian faith seized upon. In either case, the experience affirmed by faith is not of the same species as the explanation furnished by theology.

There are innumerable examples to support these assertions ; we will indicate only a few borrowed purposely from the central dogma of Christianity, the doctrine of the person and of the work of Jesus Christ.

At first view, the Christian and Protestant idea of redemption is conditioned by the explanation of the theocratic sacrifices and propitiatory rites of the Old Covenant. He who holds to the letter of the scriptural documents will always be tempted — let us say more, he will always be obliged — to search in Leviticus for the key to the understanding of the death of the Savior.<sup>1</sup> Did not the apostles themselves find, in the religious usages and traditions of the Old Testament, the prophetic types of the redemptive and expiatory work of Christ? It is undeniable that their examples should have the force of law for us if we are not allowed to distinguish between their religious faith and their scriptural argumentation and typology. Nowhere would this dis-

<sup>1</sup> This is the point of view of the old orthodoxy and of the theology of the Awakening.

tinction between the essential value of their religious affirmations and the relative and secondary character of their theological explanations appear more necessary and more evident. In a word, all of our sacred writers agree upon one chief point, that "there is in the death of Christ something essential which is not found in that of the oxen and goats sacrificed upon the altar of Jahveh. This something is the voluntary offering of the victim Himself; it is not devoted, it devotes itself freely and lovingly (Rom. 5:6-9). His sacrifice becomes, on that account, a moral act."<sup>1</sup> All analogy, therefore, between the Levitical expiation and the Christian redemption remains necessarily imperfect, and there is not one of the authors of the New Testament who does not recognize this with more or less clearness and consistency. Hence, the dogmatic value of their scriptural argumentation and typology has nothing absolute and general in it, but is purely relative and secondary. The docile and pious children of the Old Covenant, brought up under the religious beliefs of their people, affectionately attached to the theocratic tradition, naturally expressed or justified their new faith by the help of the images or formulas which had made up their past. That which these multiple

<sup>1</sup> SABATIER, *L'origine du péché dans le système théologique de Paul* (Paris, 1887), pp. 25, 26.

rites and manifold sacrifices of the Mosaic cult only imperfectly offered to the heart thirsting for peace and righteousness they found in the work of their Savior; the Crucified appeared to them as the Supreme Mediator, the perfect victim, the unique sacrifice. Enriched by this unspeakable gift, in possession of this treasure which surpassed all their needs and which assured to them a blessedness beyond their fondest dreams, they took pleasure in searching for and pointing out, even in the smallest details, a profound harmony between the new economy and that which Christ had abolished to accomplish it. Symbolism and typology became the auxiliaries of dogma. But the primitive and permanent inspiration of their prophetic or allegorical exegesis proceeded from their Christian faith; the comparisons and the figures which they drew from the Old Testament were, in the last analysis, only the popular illustration or the commentary, more practical than theoretical, of their new religion. We must avoid, therefore, attributing a normative character to the apostolic exegesis, or confounding the object of their Christian labors with the methods of their scriptural or dogmatic reasoning.

It would be easy to pursue this work and show the application of these principles to the entire christology of the New Testament. What

is the idea of the pre-existence of the Son of God if it is not the translation, into the language of the time, of the religious valuation of the personality of Christ, the organ eternally predestined by the divine will to be the perfect revealer of an inviolable holiness and of an infinite love, the founder of the Kingdom which the Father has prepared for his chosen ones from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34)? What is the conception of the miraculous birth of Jesus if it is not the popular and symbolic expression of a truth of the Christian experience, of the assurance that the divine light incarnated in Christ and communicated by him to humanity proceeded from a divine source; that it did not spring from our base and sinful worldly life; that the Son of God is truly a new creation, the Head of a humanity which "has in heaven its source," the second Adam born of God and living in God? What is faith in the resurrection if it is not the victorious and immovable assurance that the Lord is living; that the death of the Crucified was not the last word of his mission of salvation, but rather the inauguration and indispensable condition of an imperishable work; that the spirit of holiness, the essential factor of the earthly personality of Jesus, reached its perfect maturity in the glorified Lord, so that his activity is not bounded by

the conditions of space and time, and that henceforth the Lord is nearer to his own than during the days of his historical and earthly ministry? The predictions of the return of Christ, the eschatological notion of judgment, all the data of the Jewish and Christian apocalypse concealed also principles of permanent value, truths of infinite importance, which the dogmatist is called upon to free from their local and temporary, hence antiquated and contingent, expression, in order to clothe them with a form intelligible to contemporary thought and culture.

I am not ignorant of the fact that in the eyes of many theologians this work of elimination and concentration is equivalent to a mutilation and impoverishment of the Gospel and of the evangelical faith; but their summary condemnation is inspired by a sentiment which—I say it with all respect—is nevertheless the fruit of a grave and regrettable mistake: they persist in confounding the container and the contained, the eternal life which emanates from the Gospel and its historical and transient expression. To those who are guilty of this confusion we dare to submit some observations which will perhaps cause them to see that our point of view is something other than a fickle and culpable conception.

In the first place, this discrimination which

they reject in theory they themselves practice. To be sure, they restrain the extent of their application and limit it to what they call the secondary points of the biblical teaching, but by their very example they show that they are far from condemning the necessity and the legitimacy of the work for which they reproach us. In a word, then, the point at issue between our adversaries and us is only a matter of measurement, a simple question of the extent of application, enlarged or narrowed according to the judgment of one or the other. To tell the truth, they alone have the right to cry "Scandal!" or "Sacrilege!" who dare to profess without reservation and without reticence the doctrine of the plenary and literal inspiration of the Scriptures; but to abandon this position, to open up in the tradition of verbal inspiration gaps which cause it to fall on all sides, is not, I think, to acquire and merit the right of casting blame and discredit upon those who, after all, do not proceed otherwise than the theologians in question. Away with these illusions and equivocations! In trying to disengage evangelical science from the Hebraic or Greek element which is mixed with it, we are doing conscientiously, and in the interest of religion and science, that which each true believer, each earnest Christian, does every day, but instinctively, haphazard, unawares, for

the sake of his own edification and personal improvement. What is it which moves the believer in the presence of the redemptive work of the Savior? Is it the minute agreement between the rites of Leviticus and the details of the passion of Christ, or is it the miracle of love and devotion which stands forth in this greatest of sacrifices? What is it which, in the eyes of the lowly and the humble, of the poor in spirit and the heroes of the faith—what is it that gives to the Gospel of Emmanuel, I will not say its sovereign beauty and its conquering attraction, but its permanent truth and its infinite value? Is it the material prodigy of a birth which took place in spite of the laws of ordinary physiology, or the moral revelation of a divine communication made to humanity, of an ineffable gift of the grace of the heavenly Father to his unfortunate and lost children? What is it that causes words of confidence, of consolation and victory, to rise to the lips of the dying? What is it which causes to shine, beyond the night of our mourning, the dawn of an eternal day? Is it a theory of the transcendent and incorruptible life of the resurrection, or the confidence in a Savior who has vanquished death, who makes us citizens of heaven, and who, in our communion with him, gives us the assurance that he has securely established life and immortality? It is enough

to ask these questions to convince anyone that the attempt to distinguish the actual foundation of religious experience from the transitory form of theological explanation is to render to evangelical faith an inestimable service.

This is, indeed, to bring to theological science the most valuable light and most substantial support. In limiting biblical teaching to its religious principle, one begins to take seriously and to put into practice the organic method which the interpretation of the Scriptures demands. To assure to the dogmatic proof drawn from the biblical books its value and its force, it is necessary to get at and disengage the religious consensus which, beyond the borrowed theses and explanatory corollaries of theology, express the inner and fruitful unity of the evangelical revelation. Wherever that unity fails, wherever that religious consensus ends, there is no room for any dogmatic decision. To establish a dogma is not to quote a text of Scripture; it is not even to gather together an imposing number of proof-texts; but it is to show that the dogma is the authentic translation of the religious experience of Jesus, and that it draws its substance from the Gospel lived and proclaimed by the Christian community.

I insist emphatically upon that last point. The pretension of some theologians to reduce

the Gospel to a petty list of words of the Master, transmitted by the synoptics, seems to me as unjustified as it is dangerous. If it is true that the Gospel has appeared in the person of the Savior, if that Person has given to consciences an all-powerful impulse and is engraved with indelible marks upon the hearts of his disciples, it is very evident that we have in the faith of the primitive church the continuation of the consciousness of Jesus, the brilliancy of the light which comes from him, the magnificent breaking forth of the divine light which he has brought to humanity. In this regard, the literature of the New Testament, in spite of the strange alliance which was early established in it, is a fruit of the inspiration of Christ and is a real part of his work. To forbid oneself the dogmatic use of the epistles or the fourth gospel is therefore to restrain gratuitously the influence exercised by the historical Christ, and to injure not only the theology of the New Testament, but the divine content of the evangelical revelation. Such a mutilation would be equivalent to the bankruptcy of Protestant dogmatics.

In order to reach and express in a faithful and complete manner the religious experience in the consciousness of Jesus, we must not only follow its continuation in the apostolic age; we must also add to it a study of the preparatory revelation

of which the Old Testament is the document. A profound and exact comprehension of the religious ideas of the New Testament is possible only on the condition of constant recourse to the essential principles of the religion of Israel; it is indispensable to grasp the scriptural data of the New Testament in their organic relation to the religion of the Old Covenant and to that of contemporary Judaism. Without doubt the respectful reverence of the Son of man with regard to the past of Israel was always accompanied by a sovereign independence, but the word addressed by the Christ of John's gospel to the Samaritan woman<sup>1</sup> is the authentic expression of the thought of Jesus, which is drawn from the testimony of the synoptics. Thus Christian dogmatics can only bow with gratitude to the attempts of the young theologians who "seek to relate the teaching of Jesus to the religious development which had preceded him," and who remind us that the Master,

as well as the other men of his generation, learned to read the Old Testament through the medium of a theology which differed very materially from it. In limiting ourselves conscientiously to this comparative study we shall see a Christ more concrete, more truly human; he will appear to us in a setting which will better emphasize his incomparable grandeur, and we shall perceive once more

<sup>1</sup> John 4: 22; 'Η σωτηρία ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν.

that nothing in the course of history has sprung up absolutely *ex abrupto* and without its preparation.<sup>1</sup>

Such are some of the applications which the method of Protestant dogmatics demands. Historically, in its principle and in its results, this method may also be called psychological and experimental, not in the purely subjective and individual sense represented by Schleiermacher,<sup>2</sup> but in a larger and more substantial meaning. The experience which the dogmatist attempts to analyze and translate is the collective experience of the Christian community, the experience of which the consciousness of Jesus is at once the source, the material, and the norm.

One will see immediately in what sense we maintain that Protestant dogmatics has for its mission the scientific expression of the experiences accessible to the Protestant consciousness. Doubtless the dogmatic affirmations of the evangelical church overreach, in extent and in depth, the content of the individual consciousness of each of its members; but it is necessary that each Protestant should be in a position to make an experimental counter-test of the religious fact of which theology has established the scientific formula.

A doctrine whose religious content we are not

<sup>1</sup> EHRHARDT, "La récente controverse sur l'eschatologie de Jésus en Allemagne," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 1895, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chap. IV, § II.

able personally to test should have no right in the system of Protestant dogmatics. If it is objected that this principle might be very far-reaching, we would not contradict the statement; on the other hand, we think that the principle leads necessarily to the dissolution of the scholastic orthodoxy under all its forms. But this dissolution will be a rich gain if it involves the re-organization of Protestant dogmatics according to the evangelical norm and according to the method which we have tried to define and defend.

### III.

Thus understood, Protestant dogmatics needs the help of a series of auxiliary sciences without which the dogmatician would not be able to fulfil his task.

We will try to indicate briefly the disciplines whose collaboration is indispensable to dogmatics. In indicating the rôle of each of these, we will begin first with the facts concerning which there is no disagreement, and we will end our summary and review by an examination of the points upon which agreement among theologians is less general.

From the developments which precede, it is easy to conclude that biblical studies, in particular the disciplines which are designated, unskillfully enough, by the name of Theology of the

Old and New Testaments, possess sovereign importance for the theologian. It is permissible to affirm that our conception of Protestant dogmatics confers upon biblical theology a dignity and a value which it has never had either in the schools of confessional orthodoxy or among the theologians of the Awakening. The procedure followed by both of these was as elementary as it was superficial. They considered the Bible a collection of supernatural oracles; they used the Scriptures as an infallible code; they limited themselves to gathering up indifferently, from all parts of the biblical canon, isolated quotations and verses serving as proof-texts or instruments of their confessional polemic. The theory of verbal inspiration dragged its leveling influence through all the pages, through all the words, of the Bible, smothering the historical meaning under the weight of traditional scholasticism, destroying the personal character of individualities, effacing the differences of times and of places. They doubted neither the doctrine of unity of all the biblical books nor the identity of scriptural teachings with official dogmatics. Biblical theology had not yet become conscious of itself; it had not been established in an independent manner; it is almost as though the religious inspiration of the heroic age of the Reformation was preparing from afar its coming and its emancipation. The

problem of the relationship of biblical theology to dogmatic science had not been stated; it did not even exist.

How much has the situation of the theologian changed since the formation and the vigorous development of those disciplines which, freeing themselves from the yoke of dogmatic obstacles and polemical preoccupation, applied to the sacred books a severely historical method and set forth objectively the religious and moral ideas which found their expression in the Old and New Testaments! Henceforth there could be no question of classifying under the rubrics of official dogmatics a more or less considerable series of texts of various origins and values. We have tried to show to what delicate and difficult tasks a historical knowledge of the Scriptures invites and compels dogmaticians; we have likewise indicated already the relations which obtain between biblical theology and systematic theology.

Biblical theology is a historical science; its task is to set forth, in their genesis and in their organic connection, the religious and moral ideas of which the biblical books are the manifold and varied documents; hence it is not allowed to confound different epochs, places, and authors. It leaves to the religious witness, to each doctrinal type, its own individuality and its original form; it does not conceal the shades of meaning and

oftentimes very noticeable differences which distinguish the conceptions, or groups of conceptions, contained in the sacred books; it takes account of the surrounding atmosphere, of the environment, and of the time; it searches for the generative principle of the religious teachings or theological systems; it indicates the influences which have modified them; it determines their relations, their affinities, their divergences; it does not raise these into a synthesis until it is authorized by precise observation, and by exact and minute analysis. That is to say, biblical theology furnishes to Protestant systematic theology (dogmatics) the principal material of its scientific work. The part which the dogmatist is called upon to perform by drawing upon the results required by the biblical sciences; how he rests upon the broad and solid foundation which historical knowledge of the sacred books gives to him, and which the organic method of scriptural interpretation insures to him, according to which principles he is able to establish dogmatic proof by referring ever to the experience of the Christian community and to the religious testimony of Jesus Christ — that is what we have tried to show above. Without doubt this work is infinitely less simple and less easy than the accumulation of biblical passages torn from their context and artificially grouped according to a scheme foreign to the first inten-

tions of their authors; but the irreparable ruin of the verbal-inspiration system necessarily involves a radical transformation of the relations to be established between biblical theology and dogmatic science; if the latter is tributary to the former, it is only because a strong and profound knowledge of the historical meaning and of the religious inspiration of the sacred documents is necessary.

Delivered from the tyranny of traditional scholasticism, confined to its task of a strictly historical science, biblical theology renders to systematic theology services whose value and extent it is impossible to exaggerate. There is no presumption in maintaining that dogmaticians have hardly begun their task today by undertaking it in this way, and by orienting their labors in the direction which this new conception of biblical sciences marks out for them.

However, the faithful and independent comprehension of primitive Christianity needs an indispensable complement. While it is established that biblical theology is the first, and to be sure the fundamental, dominating chapter of the history of Christian thought, it is doubtless true that the germinating of the evangelical principle and its primary manifestations in the Jewish and Hellenic world cannot be separated from its evolution and changes through the centuries. The dogmatician

cannot take a step without a knowledge and a study of the history of dogmas.

The time is past when we may reduce the history of dogmas to a review of more or less obscure and bizarre opinions—a veritable flower-pot, once filled with rare and exotic plants, it is true, but now all dead and dried up. In the hands of Baur, of Thomasius, and of Ritschl, of Nitzsch, and of Harnack, the history of dogmas has ceased to be a simple repertoire of formulas, a museum of dogmatic antiquities; it is even more than a simple witness; it is a judge which, throwing its light on the past, enlightens the present, and often throws its prophetic gleams into the future. Applied to the erroneous elements which were mixed with the Christian truth in the course of the centuries, it is an agent of dissolution as powerful as it is salutary; but its patient inquiry, its indefatigable analysis, its constantly repeated verification, are able to bring to light the fruitful germs whose development will help us to penetrate farther in our comprehension and knowledge of the evangelical revelation. Under this head, no work since the publication of the works of Ritschl has rendered to systematic theology more valuable services than Harnack's *History of Dogma*; no one has given to dogmatic thought a more fruitful and more lasting impulse; the chapters which the author devotes to Origen,

to Athanasius, to Augustine, and to Luther are contributions, not only to history, but as well to the scientific study of the Christian truth itself.

In the dogmatic evolution of the Christian faith there are epochs and individualities to which the Protestant dogmatician necessarily gives the preference of his attention and his interest. He will have to make a specially large and important place, I will not say for the dogmatic views, but for the great religious conceptions, of our Reformers. This distinction between the formulas of their theological system and the substance of their Christian faith is essential. In the majority of cases it is impossible for us to preserve the formal outline of their theology, to appropriate to ourselves their processes of argumentation, to follow them on the ground of their exegesis ; but the sacred foundation of their very life, the glowing material of their religious experiences, their inspirations, and their intuitions—that is what it is important to conserve ; it is a treasure which every Protestant theologian ought to receive and value with pious fidelity and jealous care. It is possible and necessary to remain in close and living touch with the spiritual fathers of our church ; to establish a direct and constant connection between the problems of the present hour and the imperishable principles which have sprung from the depths of

the Protestant life; to safeguard the essential content of the grand evangelical tradition of which they were the founders and interpreters. Not to participate in a study of our Reformers in order to comprehend the religious roots of the great Protestant doctrines and even to renew their antiquated form; to break with a past of inexhaustible richness; to disdain or ignore systematically the spiritual heritage of our fathers in the faith—that is not only to display a superficial radicalism, it is also to deprive oneself gratuitously of the most fruitful and sometimes the most striking and unexpected lessons. On many points, in fact, where it is impossible for us to agree with the theological solutions proposed by our Reformers or borrowed by them from the Roman church, we find in the writings of Luther or of Zwingli, of Melancthon or of Calvin, the religious principles by whose help we are able to fill up the gaps and correct the inconsistencies or the errors of their dogmatics. In every one of these, especially in Luther, it is easy to perceive a double spiritual and theological current, one which proceeds from the Gospel regained and assimilated by inner and personal faith, another which is dominated by the influences and remnants of scholasticism and the Roman tradition. Between these two currents the choice which is imposed upon the dogmatics of contemporary

Protestantism could not be doubtful; the originators of our evangelical faith themselves traced the way which it is necessary for us to follow without hesitation or weakness.

It follows from our observations on the Reformers that, in the chain of historical sciences of which Protestant dogmatics is a tributary, the discipline which bears the name of symbolics forms an indispensable link and occupies a place of great importance. Like the history of dogmas, symbolism has undergone in our day a transformation as fortunate as it is profound, and has gained an important position in the cycle of theological sciences. Its rôle is no longer limited to writing up the dogmatic likenesses or differences which obtain between the particular confessions; it has broken with the superficial and fragmentary method of *loci*, which breaks up the fruitful and living unity of religious organisms and conserves, after this mutilation, only the scattered and lifeless members; it aspires to a view of the whole; it wishes to comprehend and express the inspiring life which has given birth to the churches and which has guided them in the rites of cult and in the mechanism of constitution, not less than in doctrinal decisions. This large and profound conception of traditional symbolics is singularly adapted to clarifying and strengthening the researches of the dog-

matician. That which we have called above<sup>1</sup> the "confessions of faith," or that which the dogmatician is supposed to draw from the primitive and authentic documents of the different Christian churches, will find its application and its confirmation in the use which the theologian will make of symbolics and in the services which it cannot fail to render to him. These services will increase and gain in extent and depth in the measure in which the dogmatician, interpreting the text of the creeds, will know how to get back of the theological formulas in order to reach the original experiences and immediate affirmations of the Protestant consciousness renewed and enlightened by the Gospel.

This work of historical criticism and of psychological and religious analysis could not be limited to the official creeds of the Protestant church and of neighboring or rival confessions. It should extend beyond that and bear upon the entire development of the Lutheran and Reformed dogmatics. The study of the history of theology is the necessary complement of the study of the history of dogmas and of symbolism. Evangelical confessionalism reached its acme in the systems elaborated by the orthodox masters of the seventeenth century, whose subtle distinctions, repulsive terminology, and incessant polem-

<sup>1</sup>Chap. V, § I.

ics too often covered up their dialectic virtuosity and their religious value. The dogmatician of our times will make a grievous mistake if he accords to the dignified documents of our fathers only the smile of pity or disdain. Some of the most eminent theologians of our century have confessed that their thought has been made more acute, has been fortified and enriched, by the school of these old masters ; it will suffice us if, inspired by their example, we shall gather from our acquaintance with these orthodox teachers, so much denounced, a serious gain which the ignorant and the proud are not aware of. Finally, if the dogmatic system of our Protestant scholastics goes to pieces ; if their philosophical arguments are worn threadbare ; if their scientific formulas often appear to us unintelligible ; if their exegesis nearly always shocks or amuses us, it is none the less true that at the bottom of that dogmatic system, which the biblical criticism, the history of dogmas, and religious psychology have condemned, there are many times concealed a precious truth, a Christian experience, a profound and delicate intuition, a living and right perception of spiritual realities, a vigorous and legitimate affirmation of evangelical piety. To disengage from a rude scholasticism the pure gold of the religious life ; to discriminate between the theological forms of the past and the

Christian truth which survives all theologies; to dispense with the formula not acceptable to modern thought and conscience, but to safeguard the religious interests to which the conscience and the thought of today should render homage—such is the lesson which not only the history of dogma and symbolics, but even the apparently unwelcome and laborious study of the master-pieces of the Reformation, should bring to the dogmatician.

Do we need to apply, in much larger measure, what has been said of Protestant scholasticism to the later theology? Profound knowledge and independent study of the dogmatic systems of modern times, particularly an understanding of the theological movement born of the great revolution consummated by Schleiermacher, are an indispensable presupposition of all progress in dogmatic science. We have so often been obliged to appeal to the principles established by the great inaugurator of modern theology, his name is so many times encountered in the course of our researches, that it seems to me useless to insist further on a point that will not be doubted by anyone.

The foregoing considerations may serve to indicate the place which it is proper to assign to Protestant dogmatics in the organism of the theological disciplines. Biblical and historical

sciences form the necessary base of operation for the dogmatician ; the very existence of dogmatic science presupposes and implies the liberal development of those disciplines each of which is indispensable to the normal work of systematic theology. If the faith of Christians of today is, in a certain sense, the child of the faith of Christians of yesterday, if to comprehend it in all its development it is necessary to get at its principle and its source, the person and the work of Jesus Christ, it follows that dogmatics and ethics could do a useful and fruitful piece of work only by resting invariably upon the solid foundation of historical theology which, taken in its large meaning, comprehends both exegesis and biblical theology. This is the classification proposed in the majority of the encyclopedias of the theological sciences. The attempt of some contemporary theologians who would make of systematic theology the point of departure or the foundation of all theology comes from a very proper sentiment, but these authors deceive themselves by drawing from indisputable premises conclusions rather more faulty than substantial. It is true that the Christian faith is the root and the *raison d'être* of Christian theology, but it does not follow by any means that it is necessary, as a first task, to express scientifically this faith and translate it into the form of dogma. Faith, but

not the systematic exposition of faith, is the presupposition of theology ; the evangelical faith, the inspiring soul of Protestant theology, the material and substance of Protestant dogma, cannot take shape in doctrine and be scientifically formulated except after a long historical development. That is so true that those who would place systematic theology "at the initial center of Christian theology" <sup>1</sup> could not, in practice, establish a doctrinal system of faith without the constant collaboration of exegesis, of biblical theology, of the history of dogma, and of symbolics. If this is true, is it not most natural and consistent to abide by the accepted division and make systematic theology the center of the organism of the theological disciplines ?

On all the questions of methodology and encyclopedia which we have lightly touched upon thus far, general agreement will doubtless be easy enough. Some of these problems have to do with mere expressions, rather than fundamental principles, and perhaps good understanding could immediately be established if on all sides the attempt were made to define precisely the elements of the discussion and if a uniform terminology were adopted. No one would find it difficult to admit that practical theology forms the crowning point of the construction of theological

<sup>1</sup> EMÉRY, *Religion et théologie*, p. 548.

sciences ; no one will dispute the essential services which a well-ordered dogmatic system renders to the preacher, to the teacher, to the pastor. On the other hand, practical theology serves as a control and counterbalance of systematic theology. In a word, what is a dogmatic system which does not lead finally to the service and edification of the church ? What would be the value of, what would be the sanction for, a doctrine which confined itself to the inaccessible spheres of pure abstract thought, which isolated itself from all the practical interests of the Christian community, which renounced the purpose of serving, at the same time, as the expression of the piety of believers and as the incentive of the thought of theologians ? "You shall know them by their fruits." Practical efficiency, religious fruitfulness, richness of spiritual and vivid applications—such is for the church the test of each theological doctrine ; such is the earnest entreaty from which evangelical dogma cannot escape ; there is the vital knot of the indissoluble relationship which unites Protestant systematic theology with practical theology.

We have spoken several times of systematic theology. With the majority of encyclopedists we mean by this term Protestant dogmaties in its relations to Christian ethics. We will define

briefly these relations and try to determine their characteristics.

The solution of the problem of the relationship between dogmatics and ethics depends upon the idea that one has of the relationship between religion and Christian morality. The indissoluble union which, in Christianity, obtains between religion and morality expresses and reveals itself in the inner relationship which exists between dogmatics and ethics. In a word, dogmatics is the systematic exposition of the Christian faith in its state of dependence upon God ; it corresponds to the religious point of view. Christian ethics is the exposition of the Christian faith in its state of activity with reference to the world and one's neighbor ; it corresponds to the moral point of view. The first of these disciplines sees in the Christian consciousness the product and the object of divine grace ; the second considers the Christian consciousness as the agent and the subject of a new life. Both bear upon identical material, but they consider it and study it from different viewpoints. Thus is explained the union which for a long time has obtained between these ; thus also is their present-day separation justified. The explanatory commentary and the proof of our proposition are furnished by the history of these two disciplines, which, from Calixtus to Schleiermacher, and from

Schleiermacher to Hofmann or to Ritschl, makes it possible to note an ever-growing consensus of opinion and very striking defense of the solution which we have only indicated here.

Though it is possible to state that the purely formal question of the classification of theological sciences will not give rise to very lively disputes, this is not the case as to the problem which I have purposely reserved until now, because the controversies concerning it are carried on with ardor at the present hour, and have caused unpleasant misunderstandings.

How must we define the relation of dogmatics to philosophy? Must we give the latter a share in the elaboration of the former? Can the dogmatist do without the assistance of the philosophical sciences, or does he need their help and their light?

Let us come closer to the question and return to our point of departure and first definition.

Protestant dogmatics is the scientific exposition of the Protestant faith. Now, the Gospel is alone the source and the norm of that faith; consequently, dogmatics cannot draw its content and find its laws outside of the Christian revelation legitimizing itself to the consciousness of the believer. In other words, no rational philosophy, no human metaphysics, no so-called profane science, is qualified to furnish to the Protestant

dogmatician the substance of his doctrine; that substance is given to him by his faith formed in the school of Christ and under the primordial and continuous activity of the Gospel. It is necessary that the religious material whose formulation dogmatics seeks should proceed from the Christian religion comprehended in its purity, that is to say, in its principle, which is the religious consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity being a life which is incarnated in a person and realized in a history, no system of philosophy can ever supply the constitutive facts of the Christian religion which are the generative facts of the Christian faith. Religious experience, determined by the Gospel, is an experience *sui generis*, inaccessible to the natural faculties and produced by a divine factor of a different order from that of the theoretical concepts which depend upon philosophy. Now, Protestant dogmatics stands upon the ground of faith; it is conceived and constructed in the interests of the communion of believers; it is the scientific organism of the experience of the church; it presupposes and implies the fact of an inner life whose origin is a new birth, whose type is realized in Jesus Christ, whose goal is the kingdom of God. It follows that dogmatic science, faithful to the guiding inspiration of the Gospel, is compelled by its very principle to find its point of

departure, its center of gravity, and its supreme sanction in an authority inaccessible to science, intangible to the philosophy of any school whatsoever.

This is the sense in which it is proper to eliminate metaphysics from the constitution of Protestant dogmatics. This elimination pertains to the content and the very foundation of Evangelical doctrine; it is the logical corollary and the rigorous application of the declaration of independence of Christian piety and the Protestant faith; it proposes to take spiritual realities of the Gospel and of faith away from the sphere of natural reason and from the jurisdiction of human philosophy.

Thus understood, the principle which we announce is only the scientific statement of the thought of Jesus and his great apostle: "I thank thee, oh Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and the learned and hast revealed them unto babes. Yea, Father, I thank thee that this has been thy good pleasure" (Matt. 11:25, 26). "Now the natural man (the psychic man) receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (1 Cor. 2:14, 15). Is it

necessary to show that what we might call the religious program of the Reformation corresponded faithfully to the words of Christ and his disciple? In declaring that theology should draw the material of its knowledge from the Gospel alone, our Reformers did not mean merely to deliver the church and its teaching from the tyranny of the Catholic tradition, but they wished also to free it from the heavy yoke or the doubtful support of all foreign speculation and all borrowed metaphysics. Although they did not accomplish that enfranchisement in a complete and radical manner, they did establish the principle with a clearness and a vigor which could leave nothing to be desired. Protestant dogmatics cannot abandon this principle. Schleiermacher attempted its application by regaining for the religious consciousness "an independent province,"<sup>1</sup> and an increasing number of theologians are occupied with this method which the illustrious author of the "*Reden über die Religion*" has indicated to us. In France, Vinet inaugurated, in an independent manner, a method which at many points runs parallel to that of which Schleiermacher has been, in Germany, the author and the most authoritative interpreter.

The historical statement of these accepted affirmations will certainly not be seriously dis-

<sup>1</sup>*Reden über die Religion, etc., 1799.*

puted; but it is probable that there will not be such ready agreement as to the conclusions to be drawn from the facts we have just stated. We will try to indicate the conclusions which, if I am not mistaken, grow out of the development of modern theology in the Protestant church.

At the foundation of the attempts which seek to insure the independence of Christian piety and of evangelical faith there is, if only in the germ, a complete theory of knowledge. It is doubtless true that those who have made the Gospel the source and the solitary norm of religious experience are not conscious of having announced a principle of philosophical import. It is none the less true that, in assigning to the data of the moral and religious consciousness a sphere inaccessible to the verdict of natural reason, they have, implicitly and unwittingly, laid the foundations of a theory of religious knowledge. In order to set forth this theory, which is at the foundation of the statements we have just made, to express it in clear and precise formulas, to apply it with safety and with rigor, it is absolutely necessary that the theologian hoping for success in such a task should be endowed with special qualifications and should have the discipline and exercise of these qualifications in a school of philosophy. In other words, every theologian who proceeds according

to a determined theory of knowledge not only needs the constant help of psychology and logic, but he must have a metaphysics. The dogmatist who would flatter himself in building his system apart from these philosophical disciplines would be the victim of a strange illusion; so far as he himself is concerned, he would handle constantly these instruments indispensable to his work, but which ostensibly he imagines he can do without; he would philosophize without knowing it.

This is not all. The dogmatist who, in the very name of the Gospel apprehended by faith, affirms that the Christian knowledge is in essence subjective and practical, that it implies the piety and religious activity of the subject, that it has for its condition a primordial and sovereign experience (I mean by that the fact of the birth into a new life)—that dogmatist would in vain profess or affect an invincible antipathy toward all philosophy and metaphysics; in taking such a position he is, indeed, very far from remaining neutral in the midst of the conflict of philosophical doctrines; by his positive and critical attitude he resolutely announces himself against one side and clearly becomes the partisan of the other.\* If he does not consolidate his religious

\* While distinguishing carefully faith from theology, we would unhesitatingly agree with Bois: "The development of

faith with some philosophical system, he still knows that among the philosophies which fill history there are some which are adverse to the vital principle of Christianity, while there are others which have profound affinities with the Gospel. Without entering here into the details of a complete discussion, I will say that among the modern systems it is in Kant's philosophy that the Protestant dogmatician will find, not the supports for his faith, but the postulates which correspond best to the constitutive experience of the evangelical consciousness. By his critical theory of knowledge and by his doctrine of moral freedom the philosopher of Königsberg furnishes to the Protestant theologian the means of translating, with force and clearness, the truths whose living material and unshakable certitude he draws from the Gospel. We are therefore far from professing the indifference of Protestant dogmatics to the material of philosophy. To maintain that one may be a Christian in his spirit while being entirely materialistic and atheistic in philosophy is to utter the most enormous folly, and it is only by a strange mis-understanding that an eminent theologian of our

philosophical science is of special interest to theologians, for progress in theology goes hand in hand with progress in philosophy."—*La philosophie idéaliste et la théologie* (Montauban, 1895), p. 4.

times has been charged with such an intellectual monstrosity.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is necessary to remove all misapprehension. If we appeal to the Kantian theory of knowledge and to the Kantian doctrine of liberty, that does not mean that the Christian faith borrows its credentials from criticism or demands its sanction. We go from the Gospel to Kant, and not from Kant to the Gospel, but believe that Kantianism puts us scientifically in a more favorable position to solve the dogmatic problem presented by religious faith.

Does anyone object that this dualism of theoretical reason and practical reason, of scientific knowledge and of moral certitude, renders all apologetics impossible? We answer that the common procedure which starts from a pretended natural religion in order to reach by demonstrative method the truths of revelation is, in effect, condemned absolutely by the principle which we are trying to defend. The only method which corresponds to the evangelical and Protestant point of view is indicated with simplicity and profound insight in the well-known word of Christ: "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching,

<sup>1</sup> WENNAGEL, *La logique des disciples de Ritschl et la logique de la kénose* (Strasbourg, 1883), p. 4.

whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7: 16, 17). When Vinet, commenting upon these words, recalls that "there is only one way of knowing the truth, that is by being in the truth," he traces for Christian apologetics the royal way which alone leads to the Gospel. Without doubt, one can study the Christian religion in an objective manner, one can consider it from without and analyze it as one of the great phenomena of history; such is the attempt made by the philosophy of religion or by the quite modern science of the history of religions. But it is important not to confound these two disciplines, as is done, for example, by the Hegelian school, which voluntarily merges dogmatics into the philosophy of religion; or as is practiced by the traditional orthodoxy, which disputes or denies the legitimacy of a science according to which the different religions are mere phenomena, objects of the disinterested researches of the historians and of the independent appreciation of the psychologist. There, in a word, is the essential difference between dogmatics and the philosophy of religion. The latter chooses its point of view and its base of operation outside of the Christian community; it has not for its final aim, like theological disciplines, the edification and the guidance of the church; it does not stop with the study of the Christian religion

alone, but it extends its investigations to all manifestations of a religious order, whose laws in the individual and in society it seeks to comprehend and formulate. Even when it is applied particularly to the study of the Christian religion it substitutes the causal point of view for the teleological; it passes upon Christianity no judgment of a practical value; it does not take account of that which our Reformers considered as essential to the solution of every religious problem—the usage of doctrine, the utility which it affords, the fruit which we derive from it, its efficacy and its strength.

That is precisely what the dogmatist seeks. He does not wish to analyze Christianity from without and have it before him as a fact independent of himself; he takes the point of view of religious faith, of Christian certitude. For piety can comprehend and explain Christianity only in the measure in which it possesses it as a life.

However, if it is impossible to prove theoretically the objective truth of the Christian religion to one who remains a stranger to the experiences which the Gospel communicates; if the only valuable and decisive legitimization of the Christian truth resides in the effects operated by that truth upon the spirit of him who gives himself up to it, then Christian theology could not

on this account give up its apologetic mission. Whether a particular discipline be intrusted with that mission or whether it be given over to dogmatics itself is of little importance; that which alone is essential is that the church and the science which works in its service shall not give up this task in the presence of the needs and necessities of modern thought and society. In the interests of the task to be accomplished it would doubtless be preferable that one should apply the law of the division of labor, dogmatics giving a scientific exposition of the Christian faith from the point of view of the Christian community, and in behalf of the members of that community, apologetics addressing itself to those who deny or dispute the legitimacy of the religious fact and the truth of the Christian religion. Apologetics will thus have a place in what was formerly called the "prolegomena of dogmatics." In defining clearly the proper domain of religion and the sphere of scientific knowledge, apologetics has the mission of showing that the religious life and the world of the divine are inaccessible to human science. They belong to a different sphere. Science is not qualified either to affirm or deny the religious life. The religious life has no hold upon science; it is not allowed to impede it in its researches or control it in its results. Again, taking the offensive, apologetics

is able, in a measure, to convince science of its inability to raise itself to a superior synthesis the need of which is essential to humanity. The religious and Christian explanation of the world alone furnishes this synthesis by making nature a means and instrument at the service of spirit and by giving to spirit for its supreme end the Kingdom of God, that is, the sovereign good realized by love.

But, independently of the particular discipline which we have just defined, Protestant dogmatics, if it is well conceived and properly conducted, may do an essentially apologetic work. In the measure in which dogmatics limits itself to the development of the content of the evangelical faith, and applies itself thus to showing the foundation of the Christian certitude, it brings to apologetics a valuable contribution. In returning constantly to the immovable foundation of the religious affirmations of the believer, the dogmatist shows that Christian doctrine is not a juxtaposition of dogmatic theses without an inner bond or common principle, but a body of well-articulated truths which condition and sustain each other, a system bearing the stamp of a living unity, an organism.

It is to this point that I would further call the attention of the reader. We have defined in the present chapter the method of Protestant

dogmatics; we have indicated its place in the cycle of theological disciplines; and we have briefly indicated the auxiliary sciences which the dogmatician cannot dispense with in his scientific exposition of the evangelical faith.

It remains to indicate summarily the inner organism of Protestant dogmatics, in order to comprehend more clearly its inspiring content and firm articulation. That will be the object of the last chapter.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ORGANISM OF PROTESTANT DOGMATICS.

I. *Critical examination of the principal methods of dogmatic classification adopted in the Protestant church.*—The local method inaugurated by Melancthon and continued by his commentators.—The *Christian Institution*; influence exercised by this masterpiece; the type of Apostolic Symbol; the Trinitarian scheme.—the Lutheran scholasticism; the synthetic method of the early doctors; the analytic method introduced by Calixtus.—The Reformed dogmatics; the federal method; the abuse and exaggerations of the method of Coccejus.—The construction attempted by Schleiermacher; his own criticism of it in his second letter to Lücke.—The necessity of following these indications and applying this program: it is necessary to borrow the principle of division of dogmatics from the Christian revelation and build the doctrinal system upon the foundation which the Gospel furnishes to faith.—Different varieties of this type.

II. *Attempt at a positive solution.*—The christocentric classification the logical result of the Protestant principle.—(1) *The dominating rôle of christology and of soteriology.*—Correlation of these two; the work of Christ is his person in action; the person of Christ is his work in power.—Radical error of the method applied by orthodox scholasticism.—Regressive procedure in the ascendancy imposed upon Protestant dogmatics by evangelical faith.—Analysis of the principal elements of the christological and soteriological dogma.—(2) *The doctrine of God.*—Hybrid character of the “theology” accepted by traditional orthodoxy.—Necessity of a return to the religious and spiritual traditions founded by the Reformation; Protestant dogmatics has for its task the scientific exposition of the religious conception of God revealed by Jesus Christ; experimental and practical character of this conception.—(3) *The dogma of creation.*—It

is not a doctrine borrowed from natural religion.—Its mission is to scientifically formulate the faith in the Creator.—The religious root of this doctrine, which is only one of the sides of the Christian doctrine of God.—(4) *The dogma of Providence*.—Content and foundation of the Christian faith in Providence; it does not rest upon the empirical observation of nature or of history; it is not a simple postulate of the moral consciousness; it is based upon the fact of the redemption completed by Christ, and it resolves itself into an act of confidence in the heavenly Father.—The religious notion of miracle and of Christian theodicy.—(5) *Anthropology*.—Point of view of Protestant scholasticism and the christocentric point of view.—The conception of man which faith in Jesus Christ implies and demands.—Christian idea of sin; it is the opposite of the Christian idea of the highest good realized and manifested in Jesus Christ.—(6) *Subjective realization of salvation and its individual and collective appropriation*.—(7) *Eschatology*.—It is the continuation of soteriology.—Content and foundation of the Christian faith in eternal life.—(8) *The dogma of the Trinity*.—It is the complete expression of the work of salvation comprehended in its ideal conception, its objective accomplishment, its inner and permanent realization.—It forms the crowning part of the system of Protestant dogmatics.

III. *Critical examination of the objections directed against the christocentric point of view*.—“Incorporated in the popular exposition of the faith, it could not be convenient in the systematic arrangement of Christian doctrine.—It breaks the bond which attaches dogmatics to philosophy.—It isolates the evangelical revelation from the religious evolution of humanity and results in a violation of the laws of history.—It misapprehends the value of natural religion and renders impossible the task imposed by faith upon Christian apologetics.”—Refutation of these objections, which proceed from a false theory of religious knowledge; criticism of that theory.—Results and conclusion.

## I.

The grouping of the materials which constitute the entire organism of Protestant dog-

matics should not be arbitrary or indifferent. It is the result of the very object of dogmatic science, of the norm which governs it, and of the method which it should follow.

Let us first gather up the information which the history of dogmatic science in the Protestant church gives to us on this point. It would be presumptuous to break with the tradition bequeathed to us by our fathers, but we should submit this tradition to a respectful and independent criticism. Questioned in this spirit, history will throw valuable light upon the problem which we are to investigate. The excellence of the first dogmatic work published in the sixteenth century by Melancthon,<sup>1</sup> the wide influence which that work exercised, the almost normative authority which it has enjoyed for nearly half a century in the Lutheran church, cannot conceal the inadequateness of the arrangement adopted by the Reformer either in the first publication or in the subsequent editions of his *Loci*. To tell the truth, the *local* method, inaugurated by Melancthon and continued by his commentators, is entirely void of scientific value. It holds to an elementary juxtaposition of the principal Christian doctrines whose connection it does not attempt to demonstrate, and which it does not attempt to reduce to a system.

<sup>1</sup> *Loci communes.*

The great religious and scientific monument of the Reformation, the *Christian Institution*, which we can consider here only from a formal point of view, indicated considerable progress in the dogmatic evolution of the sixteenth century. Calvin abandoned the local method; the attempt of 1536 followed the order of the apostolic creed; but the first revision of 1539, and especially the final edition of 1559, remained entirely faithful to the primitive type, containing a truly systematic exposition of the Protestant faith, and distinguished by the breadth of its biblical and dogmatic developments, by its simple and luminous procedure, by its solidity and exactness in details. The trinitarian scheme, adopted by the authority of Calvin, suffered numerous modifications, but continues still among those who have accepted the Reformation, where one may find it under multiple and varied forms. However, in spite of the success which this division has met even in the ranks of contemporary theology, the arrangement inspired by the traditional form of the apostolic creed does not seem to me to answer to the systematic exigencies of Protestant dogmatics. To set forth in series the dogmas which depend upon the doctrine of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is to move still within the limits of an external and accidental classification. Consequently, Calvin

did not remain bound by this superficial three-fold division. The power of his thought, the vigor of his dialectics, and the richness of his faith broke through the primitive mold; or, rather, they made a new one; they enlarged it and gave to it a form in harmony with the needs of religious sentiment and with the theological virtuosity of the great Reformer.

After the local method, there followed, in the Lutheran church, the attempt to construct systems, just as in the Middle Ages the *Summa* followed the *Sentences*; but nothing is more artificial than the laborious constructions of orthodox scholasticism, nothing is less like a living organism. Neither the synthetic method first practiced nor the analytic method praised and used by Calixtus corresponds to the real character of evangelical faith or satisfies the scientific interests of Protestant dogmatics. Doubtless the doctors were in search of a central idea, of a generative and organizing principle of a system; but the universal predominance of logic, sterile formalism in the process of exposition and argumentation, ignorance of history and experience, use of a polemic often meager and unintelligible, the insufficiency of the proof drawn from the Holy Scripture—irreparably compromised the solidity of these very imposing structures.

In the ranks of Reformed theology several

attempts at systematization were for a long time in favor, and left a profound impression upon the dogmatic work of several generations. After the sixteenth century certain Reformed doctors—Bullinger, Olevianus, Ursinus—considering revelation as a covenant between God and man, opposed the *foedus gratiae* to the *foedus naturae*. After these indications a new order was drawn up, the method called *federal* which, in the hands of Cocceius, was more directly inspired by the biblical spirit, but soon discredited itself by its abuse of religious allegory and of typology erected into a system. In distinguishing several phases of the divine education of humanity, the federal theology rose, it is true, to a very vivid and very true conception of revelation; but the dogmatic conclusion which it drew from these premises caused Christian theology to deviate from the route which evangelical faith traces for it. In a word, the leaders of the federal theology chose their point of departure outside of Christianity, whether in the *foedus naturae* or in the legal economy prior to the coming of Christ. They started out with a sort of general revelation, or rather a natural knowledge of God. This finally resulted in explaining God the Redeemer by God the Creator. Notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, it would be unjust to make Calvin the precursor or the patron

of such a method. The Reformer of Geneva was far from considering Christianity as the simple complement of a so-called natural religion universally believed and adopted. Such a conclusion would imply, in the last analysis, the affirmation that there existed a light superior to that which Jesus has brought to the world. There is not one of our ancient Reformed theologians who would have dared to sustain this thesis. Is it not, then, wise to go directly to the very heart of Christianity, under the full light of revelation, in order to find, by the help of this divine light, the living organism and harmonious body of truth revealed and realized in Jesus Christ?

It is on this account that it is not possible for us to adopt the very original construction of Schleiermacher. A champion of the autonomy of the religious sentiment, the illustrious dogmatician took up his place, in order to study the Christian consciousness, beyond the sphere of Christianity; he analyzed the general religious consciousness, in which he found the imprint of the activity of God, the Absolute Cause. It is after this study of the religious sentiment in its most elementary form that Schleiermacher investigates the Christian consciousness which comprehends two constitutive elements—the consciousness of sin and the consciousness of grace. His inquiry extends first to the consciousness of sin,

which he examines in itself and apart from the work of redemption. The exposition of the dogmas in which the consciousness of grace expresses itself forms at once the main body and the chief part of his dogmatic system. In the plan thus adopted, Schleiermacher analyzes each dogma under the threefold aspect of its immediate form in consciousness, its relationship to the divine attributes, and its relationship to the world. The best criticism of this arrangement has been made by Schleiermacher himself. In his second letter to Lücke he has sketched the dogmatic program which he was able, according to his own confession, to realize only in a fragmentary and imperfect manner in the first two editions of his masterpiece. Instead of delaying with the presupposition of the Christian consciousness, instead of analyzing the general religious consciousness and the consciousness of sin, it would be necessary, said the great theologian, in judging his own work, to bring, from the very first, all the weight of dogmatic analysis to bear upon the Christian facts, upon the consciousness of redemption; it would be necessary, for example, in giving an exposition of the Christian idea of God, to subordinate all other definitions to that of the God of love, the heavenly Father revealed in Jesus Christ; it would be necessary, at all other points of the system, to reverse the order of material,

to make the religious experience of the Christian the base of operation, and, by the regressive method of induction, to develop the content of the Christian consciousness and study its elements.

Schleiermacher believes that this method alone is in harmony with his principle, that is to say, with the declaration of independence of the Christian consciousness, with the emancipation of Protestant dogmatics with regard to philosophy and the natural and historical sciences. If he did not himself follow the method indicated with so great decision and clearness, it is because the illustrious theologian believed that he ought to accommodate himself longer to the scheme consecrated by usage and by tradition for purposes of Christian pedagogy and theological opportunism.

It is astonishing that these voluminous and convincing indications were not listened to with more attention and followed in a more decided and consistent manner by the theologians who followed Schleiermacher. The canon which he formulated with so much clearness and vigor has not been often applied to the organism of Protestant dogmatics. Some authors have, in truth, inscribed at the head of their works the *desideratum* announced by the great renewer of modern theology, but the execution of their work does

not correspond to the promises of their title-pages. There are others, however, who have taken seriously the postulate of Schleiermacher, and have applied it with clearness and consistency. Although they follow very different routes, they meet at one chief point: they do not appeal to the so-called primordial data of natural religion; they do not try to build Protestant dogmatics upon a foundation obtained outside of Christianity; they rest their theological construction solidly upon the foundation furnished by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Whether they find in the fact of the Kingdom of God realized by the Savior the dominating thought, or rather the living center, of the evangelical truth; whether they consider the entire Christian system from the point of view of the religious principle of justification by faith; whether they seek to establish the solidarity of these two conceptions which subserve and condition each other—they agree in seeking for the living unity of Christian doctrine in the work and in the person of Him who is, for the Christian, the unique foundation of salvation. The attempt common to all these theologians has been designated by a name which in itself alone is a program: their theology aspires to be christocentric. This aspiration seems to me legitimate, and I would attempt also to set forth and justify

a point of view which, while assuring to Christian faith its full independence, guarantees, for that very reason, to Protestant dogmatics its scientific dignity and its religious value.

## II.

If it is established that Protestant dogmatics is the scientific exposition of the evangelical faith, it is then altogether evident that it could not dispense with the attempt to constitute itself in a system and to form, not an artificial structure, but a living organism. It is necessary that each particular doctrine should be taken in its dependence upon its generative principle and its relationship to each of the connected doctrines ; it is necessary that the dogmatic propositions, linked together by the bonds of an unchangeable coherence, should be members of the same body, whose life is constantly sustained by an inspiring center and is felt at all points of the doctrinal organism.

This formula insuring the unity of the dogmatic system, we will guard against any search beyond the limits traced by the Gospel, because Protestant dogmatics is precisely the systematic expression of the faith which proceeds from the evangelical revelation ; we will reject every plan, every arrangement which would seek in external domains for the spiritual reality affirmed

by the Christian consciousness; we will try to draw our principle of division out of the very heart of the Protestant faith, the child of the Gospel. After our researches upon the norm and the method of Protestant dogmatics, the program, some of the principal features of which Schleiermacher has sketched, does not offer insurmountable difficulties.

Protestant dogmatics having for its source and its norm the Gospel, the Word of God, the divine revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ, it follows that the permanent foundation of the Christian faith and doctrine contains also the organizing and guiding principle of every dogmatic system. At the risk of shocking the reader by a barbarism borrowed from scholastic terminology, we would say that Jesus Christ, *principium essendi* of the Christian faith, is also the *principium cognoscendi* of Protestant dogmatics; therefore, the order which results from the consistent application of the Protestant point of view is the christocentric order.

Is it necessary to demonstrate that this thesis is the corollary which follows necessarily from all of our premises? Our sole effort should be to attempt to assure to it, in all parts of the dogmatic system, a position of practical and incontestable supremacy.

The proper object and the substance of Protestant dogmatics is the fact of salvation through Jesus Christ: that central truth is the real good in the organism of theological thought, the essential thing, the only necessary thing. "To cut off the true idea of salvation," a recent dogmatician has said, "is to destroy at one blow the reason for the existence of theology."<sup>1</sup> Thus stated, the question is placed on its true ground. It is necessary to take seriously only this simple and rich definition. In drawing clearly its limits, in developing fully its content, the task of the Protestant theologian is fulfilled.

That is to say that all other doctrines are contained in this primordial and final dogma; they are its presuppositions or its consequences. In order that they shall acquire a place in Protestant dogmatics it is necessary that they shall make good their title of essential relationship to the doctrine of salvation, the keystone of the entire theological edifice. In other words, Protestant dogmatics assigns to christology and to soteriology the chief place in the organism of the system; it clarifies all doctrines—anthropology, the idea of God, the conception of the world, eschatology—by the light which proceeds from the divine Revelation in Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup>GRETIILLAT, *Exposé de théologie systématique*, Vol. III, pp. 21-3.

By establishing the absolute primacy of the Gospel incarnated in the person and work of the Savior, everything which does not depend upon the central fact of the Christian religion is eliminated systematically from the body of Protestant dogmatics. Protestant dogmatics does not fear to discard a series of questions which have always stimulated the curiosity or solicited the speculation of theologians; it opposes an absolute *non liquet* to the researches which the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and the old Protestant orthodoxy equally loved; it sacrifices metaphysics for experience and the study of transcendental problems for the statement of positive facts; it is resigned to numerous retrenchments—serious losses in the eyes of the theologians who are mistaken as to the limits imposed upon our knowledge and as to the resources at the disposal of the human spirit, or rather of Christian faith. But that which dogmatics loses in extent it gains in authority and in certitude, since it makes itself the faithful and docile interpreter of the faith produced by the Gospel and invariably ruled by it. We will try to state and justify these assertions by sketching, in their sequence, the different parts of the christocentric organism of Protestant dogmatics.

I. The first result of the christocentric prin-

ciple is that it makes it necessary to assign the first place to the doctrine of the person and the work of Christ. Whether one starts immediately with christology and soteriology, or whether one treats first the "necessary presuppositions of the Gospel," it matters little, provided that the fundamental and central fact shall appear in full light.

The Christian faith could not isolate and separate the person of Christ and the redemptive work of the Savior; it is by what Christ has done for me that I know what he is to me; it is through the fact of redemption that I comprehend the person of the Redeemer; it is the work which reveals to me the Workman. If such is the experimental affirmation of the Christian faith obedient to the inspiration and to the testimony of the Gospel, it is necessary that dogmatic science should follow with docility the indications of this faith and conform rigorously to the data of revelation. "The work of Christ is his person in action, as the person of Christ is his work in power;"<sup>1</sup> hence christology and soteriology must be taken in their inner correlation and in their living and fruitful unity. Christology finds its positive sanction and its constant complement in soteriology. On the other hand, soteriology is only applied christology, developing

<sup>1</sup> E. SCHÉRER, *La critique et la foi*, p. 37.

and realizing its content. What will be, consequently, the course followed by a dogmatics faithful to the positive testimony of Christ and to the piety of his first disciples? The first and principal object of its inquiry will be the historical personality of Christ revealed in his words and in his work. The method which the very nature of Christian faith imposes upon us is the regressive method, the method *a posteriori*, starting from the positive data of the evangelical history and the spiritual realities of the Christian consciousness in order to reach the divine source whence flow the revelation and the activity of the Savior. Proceeding thus, dogmatics only reproduces the experience of the believer in the presence of the person and work of Christ; it endeavors to give precise language and complete expression to the sentiment which, prior to any reflection or system, draws the Christian to his Lord, binds him to his person, and bends him before his feet. In a word, the faith of the first witnesses of Christ was awakened in their spirits by the contemplation of the Lord, by association with his spirit, by communion with his life: "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life and we have believed and have known that thou art the Holy One of God."<sup>1</sup> Such is the spontaneous cry of their hearts in the pres-

<sup>1</sup>John 6:68, 69.

ence of the great and striking revelation of God in Jesus Christ ; such is the triumphant affirmation of their experience and the constant burden of their testimony. What they have heard, what they have seen with their eyes, what their hands have touched, that is what they have announced ;<sup>1</sup> and if their word has found echo, if their ministry has not been sterile, if their apostolic activity continues through all the ages and over the most different lands, bearing blessed and beneficent fruits, it is because the preaching of the witnesses of Christ is a presentation of the person of the Savior ; it is because they have placed before our eyes the image of the crucified Christ ;<sup>2</sup> it is because each convinced spirit is conquered by the gentle and powerful attraction of Him who went about from place to place doing good, who, reviled, did not revile again ; who, when he suffered, did not threaten ; who was the good shepherd giving his life for his sheep.<sup>3</sup>

Studied in the light of the Gospel, analyzed into its essential elements, the work of the Redeemer presents itself to the Christian faith under a double aspect. The religious consciousness of the believer comprehends and embraces in Jesus Christ the perfect revelation of God ; the moral consciousness of the believer recognizes and greets in Jesus Christ the perfect manifestation of man.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1:1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 3:1.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:11-15.

By him and in him we apprehend by the most decisive demonstrations, by direct and immediate experience, what God is for us and what we are for God. These two sides of the soteriological problem correspond to what the old dogmatics called the prophetic and sacerdotal office of Christ. Finally, far from sacrificing the royalty of the Lord, we establish it upon a foundation as broad as it is solid. To analyze the two sides of the work of Christ is to explain in what sense he is our Lord, since his spiritual royalty manifests itself and legitimizes itself to our consciousness by the divine truth which has awakened us, and by the divine light which he has communicated to us.

The revelation of the person of Christ and the development of his work was consummated in the sacrifice of his life. The death of the Savior, the key to which he gives in the act of the Last Supper celebrated with his disciples, is at once the crowning point of the worldly activity of Jesus and the summit of his moral and religious consciousness. In this sacrifice of himself one may comprehend with perfect clearness the inner and profound harmony which rules between the message and the person of Christ. In his eyes, his death was brought about by events and predicted by the prophets only because it had been willed by God, and it had been willed by God

because it was to enter as a positive and integral element into the redemptive work of the Savior. Transforming by the power of his faith the brutal fact into a moral act, Jesus made the moment of his defeat the instrument of his victory ; he gave himself, because, obedient to the divine will and trusting in the love of his Father, he felt that by his death he would give himself more perfectly and completely :

The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. . . . I lay down my life for my sheep. . . . No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down myself. . . . Take ye, this is my body, this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many.<sup>1</sup>

However, faith does not confine itself to the contemplation of the worldly ministry and to the historical testimony of Christ ; obedient to the religious testimony which solicits it, it discovers, in the revelation of which the person and the work of the Savior are the center and object, a series of postulates assurance of which is integral with its very experience and bases itself upon the positive affirmations of the religious consciousness. These postulates pertain at once to the destiny of the work of Christ in the future and to the origin of the person of Christ in the past.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:48; John 10:15, 18; Mark 14:22, 24.

On one hand, in a word, he who has found in Jesus Christ the God with whom he is in communion, he who has found pardon for his sins in this communion with God, has found life and salvation; he is assured that the light which raises us above the world and delivers us from the world does not come from the world. The experience of the saving power of Christ proves to the believer that the Head of the Kingdom of God and the author of redemption could not have been the prey of death. The apparent defeat of Christ upon the cross was not an annihilation, but rather an elevation into an activity more vast and more intense than his earthly ministry. The Christian spirit subscribes without reservation to that word of the Apocalypse: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead and behold I am alive forever more and I have the keys of death and of Hades."<sup>1</sup> We know that "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God."<sup>2</sup> That life unto God,  $\zeta\eta\tau\acute{a}\theta\epsilon\omega$ , is a life of salvation and blessing, of the kingdom of believers founded by him. Faith in a living and glorified Lord is not for us a theological corollary nor the mythological expression of

<sup>1</sup> 1:18.    <sup>2</sup> Rom. 6:9, 10.

an idea ; it is the direct affirmation of our experience founded upon the Gospel. On the other hand, evangelical faith affirms with a certitude none the less absolute that the divine life incarnated in Jesus Christ and communicated by him to humanity proceeds from a divine source, which is the pure emanation of a power whose final cause and secret we cannot find in ourselves. That is the imperious postulate of the Christian faith which must impute to the sovereign and all-powerful grace of the heavenly Father the gift that he has made to us in the person of his only Son. The appearance of the originator and dispenser of divine light implies and necessarily presupposes a special manifestation of God, a creative and sanctifying intervention of his Spirit, which in the midst of humanity has created a new personality, breaking the bonds of sin and inaugurating upon the earth the Kingdom of Heaven.

Does this exhaust the content of the Christian consciousness formed by the Gospel and placed in the presence of the person and the work of Christ? I think not ; we have yet another step to take. The divine love, as the center of the life of the Savior, illuminated by the splendor of which the cross of Calvary becomes the throne of glory of the Son of God—this love transfigures all things in the eyes of the Christian faith ; it embraces and dominates all ages. The

first word of creation and the ultimate solution of history, it shows itself the inspiring and controlling thought of humanity and of the universe. It is by establishing ourselves upon the testimony and the work of Jesus Christ that we dare to believe that the kingdom established by the Savior has been the chief object of the divine love and the goal of eternal wisdom ; that the economy of nature is the handmaiden of the economy of grace ; that the appearance of Christ gives to us not only the key to the destiny of humanity, but the last word of the religious explanation of the world.

This is a rough sketch of the program of christology and soteriology based by Protestant dogmatics upon the experimental foundation of salvation and referred back to the higher synthesis which the Gospel furnishes to us. Without doubt this regressive and upward course of theological thought which, following the development of the Christian faith, seeks its center of gravity in the historical facts of revelation and in the indisputable experiences of consciousness, this experimental procedure of Protestant dogmatics, at once historical and psychological, is the exact antipode of the process adopted and practiced by the traditional orthodoxy which proceeds *a priori*, takes its point of departure from the Trinity, and does not descend to the

positive realities of the life and work of the Savior until it has soared in the limitless space of a metaphysics charged with clouds and full of dangers. But if the method to which we invite the reader departs from the rugged and thorny paths of our old theology, it rejoins the royal and straight road which the Gospel traces for us and the general direction and principal stages of which our Reformers discovered and indicated with remarkable clearness. To cause dogma to spring from the religious and ethical interest which has been its generative and directing principle, instead of sustaining it painfully by the aid of facts borrowed from Greek philosophy or from natural theology; to attach christology to soteriology by the bond of a living unity and perfect reciprocity; to establish the unique dignity, the sovereign authority, the divine value of the person of Christ, not upon the shifting sands of speculation or reveries beyond all control, but upon the solid base of the redemptive work realized by the life and the death of the Savior; to state and solve thus the christological problem—this is at once to realize the authentic thought of the sacred writers and to bring contemporary theology back to the religious principle of the Reformation and to the tradition which it inaugurated with a piety as great as its independence.

2. Thus also will be rendered to theology religious and practical understanding in all parts of the system of Protestant dogmatics, the scientific expression of the Christian faith.

In a word, christology, thus understood, gives us at once the key to theology taken in its limited sense, that is, the doctrine of the existence and the attributes of God.

The doctrine of God, elaborated by the schools of Protestant orthodoxy, is far from being the organic fruit of the religious development which issued from the Reformation; it is rather a return to the scholastic tradition of the Middle Ages, and in a whole series of questions it is a departure from the point of view of our Reformers, which, taken as a whole, is the point of view of the Gospel.

The theology of the scholastic doctors is an attempt at a synthesis between the data of the Old and New Testaments and materials borrowed from Greek philosophy, notably from Neoplatonism which, through the medium of Dionysius the Areopagite and of Scotus Erigena, exercised an influence as wide as it was profound upon the theological and philosophical speculation of the Middle Ages. Doubtless the theories of our old theologians as to the Absolute — a pale phantom, an ultimate abstraction, which escapes thought and is above Being itself, the nameless sub-

stratum of the universal essence — these most adventuresome and most sterile theories never succeeded in breaking completely the thread which attaches the notion of God to the Gospel, but the living conception of the heavenly Father, of the God of holiness and of love, vanishes more and more, and the terminology, learnedly complicated in folios and dogmatic manuals, instead of reproducing the divine truth in its characters of simplicity and depth, of sobriety and exultation, ends in obscuring the teaching of the Gospel and substituting the quarrels and quibbles of the school for the word of Christ and his disciples.

As against these errors, one could not recall with too much emphasis that the God the religious apprehension of whom Protestant dogmatics attempts to formulate scientifically is the God of the Gospel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The particular task of theology, therefore, cannot be doubtful ; it must draw its inspiration from the testimony of Jesus and his apostles ; the faith which dogmatics attempts to translate must be the fruit of the work of Christ, the echo of his word, the prolonged vibration of his consciousness. Religious knowledge of God is not acquired by the discursive method of theoretical reflection, nor by mystical contemplation or ecstasy ; it is an act of faith which apprehends the revelation offered by God himself. Religious

knowledge of God is the experience of the living activity of God. To know God is to trust his grace, adore his holiness, experience his blessing and his mercy, to abandon oneself to his power, to his wisdom and love. This knowledge is a possession, the acceptance of a divine gift, the experience of a new life which proceeds from above, and which is nothing other than pardon, peace, righteousness, strength, joy. This knowledge, which is a life, is, on that account, a light ; it extends to that which we need to know, to the purposes of God with regard to us, to his thoughts of unchangeable justice and eternal love. That, in a word, is what it is important for us to know ; there is the proper domain of faith. Faith does not inquire what God is in himself in the inaccessible depths of his being ; it asks what God would be for us ; it praises his providential dispensations toward us ; it rejoices and returns thanks for his wisdom and his power, for his justice and his love ; it is the true cult, the *λατρεία λογική* (Rom. 12 : 1), the reasonable worship which honors God as he would be honored. Now, the christocentric principle, the consistent application of which we demand for all Christian dogmatics, teaches us that the only way to the attainment of this worship, this Christian knowledge of God, this living faith in the heavenly Father, is Jesus Christ. He has done more than to announce to

us the God of love and holiness ; he has revealed him to us in his person, in his life, in his ministry of mercy, in his sacrifice upon Calvary. Knowledge of God resolves itself for the Christian into communion with the Father, to whom the Son, our Lord and our brother, leads us ; that is the experimental affirmation of the Christian consciousness, the unchangeable thesis of the christocentric doctrine.

This is also the religious inspiration of the Reformation and the core of its theology. Let us recall the beginning of the great Catechism of Luther :

That is God, and is called God because of the bounty and the power from which you may expect all good things and to which you may have recourse in all misfortunes and dangers, so that to have this God is nothing else than to believe in him with all the heart, and to place one's entire confidence in him.<sup>1</sup>

Says Calvin :

Those who aspire to decide this question, namely, what God is (*quid sit Deus*), only indulge in frivolous speculation, for it is expedient for us rather to know of what quality he is (*qualis sit*), and what is suitable to his nature. . . . . We have to note that we are invited to a knowledge of God, not of the kind, as many imagine, that flies to the mind only in speculations, but that which has proper firmness and produces its fruit, that is, when it takes possession of us quietly and becomes rooted in our hearts. For God is manifested to us by his virtues, and

<sup>1</sup> *Catech. major*, I, §§ 1, 2.

when we feel their force and vigor in us, and enjoy the goods which come from them, there is reason enough that we should be touched to the quick by such an apprehension rather than imagining a God far from us, and who does not make himself felt by effective force. From this we have to conclude that the right way to seek God, and the better method that we may make our own, is not to indulge in a curiosity very bold in its inquiry as to God's majesty, which we should adore rather than probe too curiously, but to contemplate it in his works, by which he has brought himself near and made himself familiar to us, and by the manner in which he communicates himself to us. . . . . When finally the wisdom of God was manifested in the flesh, it declared to us openly all of God that can enter into the human spirit, and all that the human spirit can think about God. Because we have Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, shining upon us, he gives to us the perfect light of the truth of his Father, as at noonday; for it could not appear at all before he disclosed it, and he did not in any manner obscure it. For surely the apostle did not wish to signify a vulgar thing when he said that God had spoken to the fathers by his prophets in divers portions and in divers manners; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his beloved Son (Heb. 1: 1, 2). . . . . If we would find the paternal mercy of God and his benevolence toward us, we must turn our eyes to Christ, in whom alone reposes the good will of the Father (Matt. 3: 17). If we would seek salvation, life, and immortality, we must not go elsewhere, for he alone is the fountain of life, the door of salvation, and the heir of the heavenly kingdom.\*

These citations, which it would be easy to multiply, suffice to show that in spite of their incon-

\**Christian Institution*, I, 2, 2; 5, 9; IV, 8, 7; III, 2, 4, 5.

sistencies and hesitations our Reformers had the firm and clear intention of borrowing their idea of divinity from the Christian revelation. Their God is not a metaphysical image derived by an effort of the theoretical reason in search of arguments drawn from I know not what natural religion; it is a religious reality accessible to faith, a power in the spiritual and moral life perceived by those who abandon themselves freely to its influence. The certitude that we have of the existence and activity of that Being who at the same time binds us and frees us, condemns us and saves us—that certitude is produced in us by the positive manifestation of a new life which, in the midst of our humanity, legitimizes itself constantly to our consciousness as a divine life, fully realized in Jesus Christ. He it is who, conquering our spirits by his holiness and binding them to him by his love, has awakened in the profoundest depths of our being an infinite trust in an all-powerful goodness; it is he who, transforming by his obedience and his devotion all the powers of evil into instruments of salvation, of blessing, and of victory, remains forever, for all his believers, the living proof and the incontestable witness, I will not say of the existence of a God merely, but of the "Good Will" of a Father.

Thus the Christ, opening to us access to God, makes us triumph over sin and places the world

beneath our feet. In translating this affirmation of faith into the language of dogmatics, we hold that christology, which expounds "special theology," establishes and defines at the same time a cosmology: God the Savior reveals and guarantees unto us the Creator and Providence.

✓ 3. The content of our faith in God as Creator does not belong to the sphere of so-called natural religion, and the foundation of that faith does not rest upon rational arguments, upon scientific theses, or speculative theories. If I repeat with the old symbol, "I believe in God, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth," it is because I rest upon the testimony and work of Christ; I believe that I have been called into existence by a sovereign Will which is at once perfect wisdom and infinite love; it is because I have the inner and unshakable conviction that the universe of which I myself am only an atom appears in its immensity and obeys in its course the God whom Jesus has taught me to call my Father; it is because I know that this universe itself has a higher meaning and a divine goal, which is the Kingdom of Heaven, founded by Jesus Christ and presented in his person; it is because the divinely revealed knowledge of the ultimate end of nature and of history guarantees to me the divine origin both of history and of

nature. Faith in God the Creator is not a scientific theorem; it is a moral certitude, an affirmation of the conscience, a *fiducia cordis*; that is to say, it is involved in faith in the heavenly Father; it partakes of the inner nature of the Christian and Protestant faith, which is essentially confidence, obedience, surrender. The scientific expression of the religious faith in God as Creator, the Christian dogma of creation, is therefore something other than an axiom of spiritualistic philosophy, one of the *articuli mixti* accessible as such to the light of natural reason; it belongs to the organism of Protestant dogmatics; it constitutes one of its integral elements; it is likewise only one of the sides of the Christian doctrine of God. It is thus that our Reformers understood it. Luther, in his catechisms and sermons, Melancthon, in the first edition of his *Loci*, have emphasized the religious root of the dogma of creation and have shown its essentially Christian character. One finds in the work of Zwingli and of Calvin the indications which, though less clear and characteristic, still point in the same direction, and the old theologians of the orthodox age themselves possessed a confused sentiment of the truth affirmed with so great vigor and clearness by the spiritual fathers of our church. On this point, as upon the others, christocentric theology is only a return to the primitive point

of view and to the original and authentic inspiration of the Reformation.

4. What has been said of the doctrine of creation is applicable also to the doctrine of Providence. To tell the truth, faith in Providence is even more essential to the Christian consciousness. It has a more immediate character and, if I may so say, a more elementary and intimate character than faith in God as a creator; or, rather, these two are inseparable; both are involved in one act, a freely affirmed act of dependence, an act of confidence and surrender to a Will of perfect wisdom and eternal love. The Christian faith in Providence is faith in the fatherhood of the God of Jesus Christ.

This fact, this truth which no Christian should seriously question, traces for science the program which it should follow in establishing and developing the dogma; it indicates clearly to it the foundation upon which the Christian doctrine of Providence should rest. It is necessary that the rock upon which our Christian experience abides should be the immovable foundation of our theological thought, since the theologian has no other mission than to formulate scientifically that experience.

Upon what grounds do we believe in divine Providence? Is that faith the fruit of our natural experience? Does it spring spontane-

ously from our spirits in the presence of the wonders of creation? Is it the spectacle of nature which, by the double infinity which surrounds us, the infinitely great and the infinitely small, causes the cry of confidence and of gratitude to rise from our hearts to our lips, a homage of instinct rendered to the activity of Providence? Verily, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19: 2); but if nature speaks to us a sweet and wonderful language, it also has frightful silences and implacable cruelties. When the blind forces of the unchained elements crush beneath their pitiless blows the human atom lost in immensity, when the universe takes up arms to break the bruised reed, which a zephyr or a drop of water could destroy, when death under a thousand equally grievous forms throws its sinister shadow across the horizon of our life and our peace, then does the voice of nature in our ears and hearts sound like a hymn of praise to Providence?

Or shall we search in history for proof of the existence and activity of a perfect Will, a supreme Power at the service of wisdom and goodness? It is true that in the great arena where the crimes and the virtues of humanity battle together, the attentive and penetrating eye of the observer can sometimes discover some

plan, a design or thought which seems to dominate the conflict or even to inspire the combatants; it is true that one frequently sees the good triumph over the evil, vice unmasked and punished, honesty recompensed and crowned; but by the side of these happy and encouraging experiences how many bitter disillusionments; how many humiliating, bewildering, or revolting defeats; how many victories which insult our most sacred feelings; how many fatal obstacles or cruel inflictions are directed by brutal facts against our most cherished hopes, against our faith in right, truth, and justice!

Is it necessary to take refuge in the inaccessible sanctuary of the conscience? Shall we make of Providence the postulate of a moral order assurance of which is immanent in practical reason and is involved in the categorical imperative and the law of duty? Noble and touching effort of the soul in love with the ideal, thirsting for righteousness and virtue! But is it not true that this law which occasions and establishes our dignity also accuses and condemns us? If it is our glory, it is also our torment, for it is not in our conscience that we may read, in distinct and luminous characters, the irrefragable assurance that if God rules he makes all things work together for our good. Neither the contemplation of nature, nor the spectacle of history,

nor the testimony of our conscience, gives to our faith the foundation it needs.

"We burn with the desire to find firm ground and a final abiding foundation upon which to build a tower that will raise us to the infinite. But our foundation crumbles, and an abyss opens in the earth beneath."<sup>1</sup>

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. If God is for us, who is against us? He who spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:28, 31, 32). Here is the Christian confession of faith in Providence; this is the luminous and simple formula which expresses completely the content and the proof of that faith. The Christian faith in Providence is the confidence in an eternal love which has realized its economy of grace in Jesus Christ. This conception of divine economy is only another form of the Christian idea of Providence. Divine economy, that is to say, the precise plan, the vigilant solicitude, the benevolent and loving guidance of the Father nurturing his own, sustaining, saving his children—this economy of grace is revealed, accomplished, guaranteed in Jesus Christ. Expressed in the language of science and formulated in dogma, this faith gives birth

<sup>1</sup> PASCAL, *Pensées*, ed. Havet, Vol. II (1866), p. 6.

to a theodicy; it establishes the religious notion of miracle; it gives to the problem of evil the only solution of which it is susceptible, a practical solution which does not solve its mysteries, but which claims our sanction by the certitude of a love greater than the world and stronger than sin, sorrow, and death. Such is the point of view of our Reformers, who only took up and applied the word of the great apostle (Rom. 8: 32), since they founded faith in divine Providence upon the fact of our redemption and salvation. In their eyes, belief in the Providence of the heavenly Father is, indeed, as a modern theologian has said, the Christian conception of the world in a nutshell.<sup>1</sup> How far we are from orthodox scholasticism and the fantasies of modern speculation! "Our Father which art in heaven"—that prayer is the Christian's affirmation of his faith in Providence, and Protestant theology goes far astray if it draws the elements of its dogma from any other source. "He who hath seen me," said the Christ, "hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). It is the Son who has revealed to us God, *our* God.

5. He also reveals to us man. As we go from christology to theology, in the proper sense and restriction of that term, we also ask of christology the solution of the problem stated by religious and Christian anthropology.

<sup>1</sup> Ritschl.

What, in a word, is the object and what are the limits of the anthropological doctrine in the organism of Protestant dogmatics? Traditional theology answers this question either by borrowing from psychology a series of auxiliary theses or by drawing from the documents of the Old and New Testaments the indications which it transforms into dogmatic rules and to which it gives normative authority. The solution thus obtained errs by its lack of clearness and unity, which seriously compromises its solidity. By permitting excursions into domains which do not belong to the evangelical revelation and which do not fall under the cognizance of the Christian consciousness, popular orthodoxy has introduced into ecclesiastical dogma foreign elements which hasten its ruin and dissolution. With these problems, which set out with a false idea of the very conditions of knowledge, like the problem of the origin of souls, the old theology mingled questions which, while not deprived of religious interest, were formulated in a faulty manner and rested upon ground poorly chosen. Such are, for example, the two notions of the *status integritatis* and of the *status corruptionis*, the primitive state of humanity and the fall with its consequences. The ancient doctrine bears upon these two notions and centers its religious affirmations in them.

Applied to the anthropological dogma, the christocentric principle which we have tried to expound has at once a critical and negative value. It excludes from the system of Christian dogmatics all theses borrowed from ethnography and from psychological and physiological sciences. In the second place, it disengages from the conception of the *status integritatis* the religious and moral content which is contained in it, but which is smothered and obscured by orthodox scholasticism. The latter, in a word, not contented with establishing the strictly historical character of the tradition of Genesis, has singularly overreached the limits within which the ancient narrative confines itself; it conceals, also, insoluble contradictions which criticism has many times sifted out and which do not resist any serious and independent analysis. It finally commits the error of shifting attention away from the real problem and of carrying the faith of the Christian and the thought of the theologian to matters which only very indirectly interest and concern the religious consciousness of the believer. Brought back to its precise limits and placed in its true light, the question stated by Christian anthropology reduces itself to this: What is the conception of man implied in and demanded by our faith in Jesus Christ? What judgment does the Gospel yield on the

nature, the origin, and the end of man? Where the Gospel is silent, we are not authorized to supplement its silence by borrowed theses, by scientific hypotheses, by traditions drawn from the history of religions, or by speculations issuing from ancient or modern philosophy. That is to say, we should not force into the circle of Christian dogmas a chapter on the primitive nature of man, on the original perfection of our first parents. For the fantastic picture which orthodoxy has drawn of Adam and Eve, Protestant dogmatics, inspired by the Gospel, substitutes the Christian idea of the moral and religious destiny of man, revealed and realized by Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The religious explanation which Jesus offers as to our destiny furnishes us thus the solution of the antinomies which arise in our minds between our limited nature and our infinite aspirations, between the bitterness of our experiences under the law of sin and our inextinguishable thirst for righteousness, peace, and love. In other words, if we search in the Christian revelation, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in his work and in his person, for the correction which the popular conception of *status integritatis* demands, we must apply the same principle to the connected doctrine of the *status corruptionis*, the for-

<sup>1</sup> This is Wendt's point of view.

mula by which ancient theology designated the doctrine of sin.

Traditional orthodoxy makes the account of the fall, considered as a real history, the foundation of the Christian doctrine of sin. The fall with its consequences is considered by our ancient theologians as the counterpart of the state of innocence in which the hand of the Creator placed our first parent. The *status corruptionis* has for its natural and immediate correlative the *justitia originalis*. The fall is nothing other than the loss of that original righteousness; the misery of the present condition of man is determined by the contrast with the primitive condition of man; the abyss into which he has fallen by his error is measured by the height to which he had been raised by the Eternal. Consequently, the norm of moral and religious appreciation which the traditional doctrine applies to sin is precisely the religious and moral ideal which is expressed in the notion of the *justitia originalis*. That is the material which orthodoxy furnishes to the Christian consciousness in order to consider the experimental fact of sin; this is the angle under which it would have us consider the moral and religious evil of humanity. Furthermore, the work of salvation is only the re-establishment of the primitive relationship between the Creator and Adam, the

reintegration of the divine image changed by the disobedience of the father of our race. The final order will be identical with the primeval, so that the second Adam has only regained and given back to humanity the titles of nobility which the first Adam lost for himself and for his descendants. The entire economy of salvation is therefore construed from the point of view of that *justitia originalis*, which, according to popular orthodoxy, is the first and the last word of the divine purposes for humanity.

If the christocentric method which I have tried to defend breaks with this theory, it is by no means because the latter leans upon the historicity of the tradition of Genesis; far from it. If we should be brought by irrefragable arguments to affirm the historical character of the ancient narrative, we should none the less refuse to give to this narrative the decisive and normative value of a dogmatic criterion, calculated to govern the affirmations of our religious consciousness as to sin. In a word, the old theology, going back to the state of the primitive innocence of man before the fall in order to determine the characteristics and the nature of sin, places itself in fact beyond and outside of the Christian revelation. It erects into a supreme norm an ideal which has not been formed under the power of the Gospel; it brings the evangelical revelation down to the

level of a simple complement of the natural order. Shall I say more? It subordinates the economy of grace to the economy of law; it deprives Christ of the religious hegemony of humanity to confer the supreme primacy upon man before the fall, upon Adam still in possession of his original righteousness, upon the creature in the state of innocence and happiness who preceded the entrance of sin into the world.

As against this point of view, the christocentric conception seeks in the Christian revelation the only law governing its appreciation of sin. Without doubt sin is a phenomenon encountered outside of the domain of Christianity; in this regard it could not be the same object of divine revelation. But if sin is not a revealed reality, it is a fact which falls under the appreciation of the Christian revelation or of the Gospel. The Gospel has not created this object which we have to analyze, but it has made us capable of measuring its extent and of feeling its profound gravity. In other words, Protestant dogmatics has for its mission the definition of the consciousness of sin which Jesus Christ has brought to the world. The Christian idea of sin is not the counterpart of the picture of the *justitia originalis* conferred upon Adam; it is the opposite of the idea of the sovereign good realized by Jesus Christ. It is in the essentially

Christian sphere that we are to find the key to the dogmatic idea of sin; only in the light of the person and the work of Christ, upon the sacred soil of the Kingdom of God, in the very heart of the divine revelation in the second Adam, shall we find the solid base of operation, the proper point of observation, the true norm of appreciation, the formula of explanation authentic and conformable to the exigencies of the Christian and Protestant consciousness. The analysis of the moral and religious consciousness of sin, the consciousness formed in the school of the evangelical revelation, and finding its center of gravity in the religious testimony and the redemptive work of the Savior—such is the task of christocentric dogmatics alone in harmony with the religious interests of the Protestant consciousness.

6. When once in possession of the Christian idea of God and the evangelical doctrine of man and of the world, it will not be difficult for the dogmatician to set forth the dogma of the subjective realization of salvation in the individual and in the Christian community. Upon this point the agreement among theologians is less doubtful than upon the method to be employed in formulating scientifically the religious consciousness of God and of man. It is very evident that in order to determine the

Protestant conceptions of justification and of sanctification, of the church and of the sacraments, it is not possible to cut loose from christology: "The manner of participating in the grace of Jesus Christ, the fruits which it brings to us and the effects which follow it . . . . , the exterior means or helps which God uses to invite us to Jesus Christ, his Son, and to hold us to him" <sup>1</sup>—these vital doctrines of the Christian system are necessarily dominated by the christocentric point of view, and this is not the place to insist upon the bond which attaches these dogmas to the central dogma of the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Even if one should prefer to introduce the systematic exposition of these truths into what some eminent theologians have called "the economy of the Holy Spirit," <sup>2</sup> it would always be necessary to show that that Spirit is precisely the Spirit of Christ, the inspiring soul of his work, the divine principle of his person. Under this condition alone, the doctrine of the appropriation of salvation by the individual and the church, withdrawing from the domain of abstract ideas, will have the solidity and the consistency which the historical foundation of the redemptive work of Christ will assure to it. The church and the sacraments, in a word, are

<sup>1</sup>CALVIN, *Christian Institution*, Books III and IV.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Schweizer and Kahnis.

only the Gospel in operation, the *promissio gratiae* rendered visible and communicated to faith, the *pictura verbi*, whose body and substance are in the Savior, the corner-stone of his church and the sovereign dispenser of all the means of grace.

7. Finally, Christianity, being a living religion and having reached its complete development, proposes to give to its adherents the key to the future destinies of the individual and of humanity. Retained within the limits which the revelation of God in Jesus Christ traces for it, the Christian consciousness does not undertake to build, like the philosophical doctrines, a rational theory as to the nature or immortality of the soul. To establish by reasoning or by speculation the belief in the future life is to mistake the proper character of the Christian faith, since the latter is essentially a moral act, a personal conviction, an inner decision of the subject, a free gift of the heart whose confidence has been awakened and gained by a divine factor, by the testimony of Christ, or rather by his work and his entire life. Protestant dogmatics, the interpreter of the evangelical faith, limits itself to deducing from the divine fact of salvation the religious postulates which it contains with reference to the future of the believer. What are the assured prospects offered to faith by the spiritual

realities, assurance of which the Christian possesses in Jesus Christ? This is the problem which eschatology, confined to its true task and conceived in the sense of a christocentric doctrine, places before the theologian. Thus understood, the Christian faith, hence dogmatic thought also, guards against making of eternal life a transcendental entity separated from the course of the present life and confined to the sphere of the hereafter; it follows the guidance of the sacred authors, notably the teachings of the Johannine preaching, which ignores the line of separation drawn between the actual realization and the future development of the divine light. Without doubt the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but it must be realized in this world, it must be organized on this earth, it must give itself a concrete and positive form in all the spheres where the Spirit of God is present and active. The disciples only undertook to continue and develop the thought of the Master. It is in the present economy that the forces of the future economy manifest and extend themselves. The present age, *ὁ αἰών οὗτος*, does not merely contain the germs of the future. It sees them already ripening, and the eternal life which the Son of God has brought to the world is more than a glorious promise; it is a happy and triumphant reality. Doubtless, the second coming of Christ will

mark, according to the sacred writers, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven; but it is permissible and necessary to translate the apostolic message into language conformable to the spiritual data of the Gospel. Thus faith assures to itself, in the progressive coming and final triumph of the Kingdom of God, the complete unfolding of the divine powers as yet mixed with earthly alloy and stained with sin. That will merely be the end of a drama which is taking place constantly about us and in us; it will be less a new catastrophe than a final culmination prepared long before and toward which henceforth all the paths of humanity converge. In other words, eschatology is only the prolongation of soteriology, and soteriology contains eschatology within itself; the Spirit of God is continually doing the work which traditional orthodoxy reserves for the end of time, and the end of time will bring a grand transformation only because it will assure the triumph of *πνεῦμα*.<sup>1</sup> Thus soteriology is primarily dominated by the eschatological conception, and eschatology directs itself in behalf of soteriological interests. What must we conclude? That there is no place in the dogmatic system for an eschatological division of independent importance which is made co-ordinate with the doctrine of salvation and

<sup>1</sup> Spirit.

which is added as a new piece joined to the body of the system. It is the fact of salvation which must occupy the royal position in the system, and everything that we are allowed to affirm touching the future, everything that revelation itself unveils to us or helps us to foresee, flows from the parent idea, or rather from the generative fact of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ.

8. This salvation decreed by the wisdom and the love of the heavenly Father, realized in the historical work of the Savior, communicated by the inner activity of the Spirit, finds its most complete and most profound dogmatic expression in the trinitarian formula which concludes the system of Christian dogmatics. In a word, he commits a great error who assigns to the dogma of the Trinity a position at the beginning of the doctrinal construction and studies it independently of christology and the idea of the church. This error is common to all of our early theologians and to the majority of contemporary dogmaticians. It proceeds from a fatal ignorance of the true meaning of the inner character of the Christian Trinity. To comprehend the meaning and value of this dogma it is altogether necessary to start out from the redemptive work in which the Son of God appears, and from the spiritual regeneration in which the Holy Spirit manifests itself.

Here is the religious substance of the Christian fact which, submitted to the reflection of the theologian, has given birth to the trinitarian dogma. This dogma, like every Christian doctrine truly worthy of the name, has its root in piety, in the inner religious experience of the Christian brought into contact with the prior and higher facts of a divine manifestation in the midst of humanity. In Jesus Christ God is revealed to us as our Father, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are the children of God. The union of God with humanity in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, or God manifesting himself in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit — that is the divine revelation affirmed by the Christian consciousness by virtue of an experience which science has not created, which it can neither demonstrate nor refute, and upon which criticism has no hold. This declaration prescribes for us the method to be employed in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, and indicates to us the place which this doctrine occupies in the economy of the Christian system. It must have its point of departure, not in the divine essence considered in itself, but in the data of revelation apprehended by faith; for the deductive and *a priori* method, here as elsewhere, must be substituted the inductive and *a posteriori* method. Every attempt at a construction of this dogma which

does not rest upon that foundation can only present a philosophical interest and do honor to the speculative spirit which has given birth to it. It could not be considered a legitimate fruit or authentic manifestation of the Christian thought, for the triad which the New Testament teaches is a religious, historical, *economic* triad, affirming absolutely nothing on the subject of a trinitarian distinction inherent in the divine essence. Official theology has not followed this method. Instead of proceeding from effect to cause and from fact to idea, it tries to comprehend the divine essence while taking no account of the divine work. Physical and psychological analogies, mystical attempts or speculative fancies, in order to justify or illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity, correspond even less to the canon which demands the christocentric conception of Christian truth. That conception, which bases all dogmatic affirmations touching the Trinity upon the constitutive elements of the doctrine of salvation, demands not less imperiously that we shall make the doctrine of the Trinity the supreme and necessary crowning point of the dogmatic structure. As a complete expression of the work of salvation, in its ideal conception, in its objective accomplishment, and in its inner and permanent realization, the doctrine of the Trinity unites in a rich and luminous expression, in a concise formula appropriate

to the needs of teaching and of cult, the totality of the divine factors of salvation and of the new life.

I have tried to sketch briefly the inner organism of Protestant dogmatics conceived and constructed from a christocentric point of view. If I have succeeded in showing the profound coherence and the living unity of a dogmatic system thus constructed, we should no longer attempt to restore the edifice of a theology which is composed only of pieces of analogy, heterogeneous elements often not yielding to any synthesis; we should not seek further to reduce dogmatics to a simple aggregation of conceptions drawn from the most diverse spheres and dressed up with certain scriptural colors; we should give to the doctrinal construction of the Protestant church the solid and broad foundation which the Gospel itself assures to faith, and we should merely translate into precise formulas the affirmations of the Christian consciousness and reproduce in the language of science the inner experience which binds and conditions all the Christian convictions in the spirit of the believer.

### III.

However, the christocentric point of view has been the occasion of very grave objections,

which it is important to examine seriously. If we can refute the criticisms which are directed against this classification and this method, we shall have established more substantially at the same time the conclusions which we have tried to state and justify.

"The arrangement proposed by the representatives of the christocentric method," someone tells us, "is perhaps suitable for a popular exposition of the Protestant faith, but it is manifestly scientifically inadequate; while good in a catechism, it would be out of place in a system of dogmatics." This objection is expressed only from the point of view of a certain speculative theology which establishes a hierarchy between the superior gnosis of the thinker and the elementary faith of the simple believer. Now, we reject such premises in the name of the Gospel and of the Protestant consciousness. If the preacher and the catechist are required to make the person of Christ the center and the base of their preaching and their teaching, the dogmatician would be greatly in error to attempt any other course and apply any other method. Dogmatic theology, like the sermon, like religious instruction, has for its mission the exposition of the Christian faith, of which the Gospel is at once both the principle and the object. Between these different manners of announcing and com-

municating the evangelical truth there is no point of difference as to source and content ; the difference pertains only to form, which will be in turn oratorical, simple didactic, scientifically rigorous, according to the service to be rendered and the needs to be satisfied. Protestant dogmatics could not have a loftier ambition than to make itself the faithful and docile interpreter of the faith, of the simple evangelical faith, of the faith of the weak and the humble, for that is the faith which brings strength and peace, the faith which regenerates and saves, the faith which Jesus demands and to which he promises pardon and entrance into the Kingdom of God. Every attempt to seek beyond that faith for any superior truth inaccessible to the consciousness of the believer, attainable only to the intelligence of the "gnostic," would be a dangerous and chimerical enterprise, for it would be equivalent to the admission that the Gospel is not the perfect revelation, and that in the sphere of pure religion the effort of philosophical thought mounts higher than that of piety and prayer.

But our adversaries are insistent. While denying that our conception of dogmatics has the value and the rigor of science, they do not admit that they thereby deprecate the Gospel or uncrown Christianity. On the contrary, they reproach us with lowering dogmatics to the level of a mere

religious technique, since we appear to break every bond which attaches it to philosophy, and to exile the science of faith to a domain outside of all contact with metaphysics and the so-called profane sciences. Is it any presumption to think that we have already refuted this objection? We have tried to show above<sup>1</sup> the fundamental difference as well as the indissoluble solidarity which obtains between dogmatics and philosophy. Dogmatics participates in the autonomy of the Christian faith, which depends solely upon the Gospel, and receives its positive content and its guiding principle solely from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Its very object assures to it independence of the philosophical sciences, which freedom it could not sacrifice without denying and destroying itself. But this sovereignty within the limits which the living material of its work traces for it is by no means hostility or systematic neutrality toward philosophy. That attitude would not only be puerile and dangerous, it would also be impracticable. Even if indifference to philosophical matters were permissible to the theologian, it would still be impossible for him. Our religious position, therefore our theological conception, imposes upon us the method of the philosopher which implies a determined theory of knowledge in general and of

<sup>1</sup> Chap. VI, § III.

religious knowledge in particular, and that theory in turn is not conceivable or capable of being tested without psychology, logic, and metaphysics, which correct and sustain it.

But, it is insisted, if you think seriously of this metaphysics, this logic, this psychology, all this circle of disciplines and philosophical ideas, why refuse their assistance? Why should we deprive ourselves of the aids which the general consciousness of humanity furnishes to the preaching and to the teaching of the Gospel? Why cast this slur upon natural religion and theology? Is it legitimate to raise an unsurmountable barrier between the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the revelation of God in nature, in science, and history? To isolate the Christ from the general evolution of humanity—is not that to place him outside of humanity itself? Is that not to condemn him and never to comprehend him? And, what is more serious, is that not to remove far from him those whom he might win? For, finally, to refuse to consolidate the world and the Gospel is to destroy all Christian apologetics, every attempt at a spiritual propaganda and a conquest of those outside of Christianity.

We will try to unravel this tangled and somewhat confused mass of objections and criticisms which are directed toward us from all sides.

In the first place we do not refuse the assist-

ance of any science ; far from it. We will call to our aid a series of disciplines which we cannot do without and among which we give to philosophy its legitimate and necessary share.<sup>1</sup> But the limitation of boundary lines is a question of principle concerning which any ambiguity is not permissible ; it is important not to mistake the field which belongs to each science, and not to demand of a series of conceptions or a method of work the services which it is not possible or capable of rendering to us. The object of each discipline determines its functions, traces its limits, and promulgates its laws.<sup>2</sup> Applied to Protestant dogmatics, this elementary rule involves all the conclusions which we have tried to establish.

The criticism that we separate the Christian revelation from the religious evolution of humanity needs to be examined very closely. It contains an accusation which we vigorously repel and a criticism which we shall always endeavor to merit. In formulating the religious judgment which the activity emanating from Christ suggests to our consciousness ; in greeting in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth the perfect manifestation of the holiness and the love of God ; in making this revelation the foundation of our religious certitude and of our Christian life, we do not intend to put forth a theory as to the

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VI., § III.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. III., § III.

means at the disposal of Providence for communicating this divine principle to the light of humanity; we do not try to explain how this new factor has been able to enter into the plan of history. It suffices for us to affirm two things: first, humanity has been divinely prepared and organized so that the Son of man has been able to become a part of it really and fully; second, the Savior has been truly a gift of God, an act of grace from above, a new beginning in history. That is to say that the appearance of "Him who was to come" has not taken place in an abrupt and magical manner in the life of humanity;<sup>1</sup> that it came about "in the fulness of time;" that this accomplishment has been preceded by a period of preparation conducted according to a plan which divine wisdom has conceived and infinite love has realized; but that is to say also that this evolution of which the cross of Calvary is the luminous and benign summit has not been a fatal movement, ordered either by the immanent necessity of an abstract dialectic or by the inflexible tyranny of a blind nature. This evolution has been an education, a moral work, a drama inspired by a sovereign Will, but with the collaboration of actors who have had a rôle to play and who have been mere instruments of the divine Will. Consequently, history must search

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VI, § III.

for the conditions in which the greatest event in the life of humanity has been accomplished; but if the historian is a Christian, he will be constrained to admit the appearance, in the life and work of Jesus Christ, of a "new principle, grafting itself upon that which existed, bending it to new ends."<sup>1</sup>

How could this confession of ignorance, inspired by an affirmation of faith, affect or injure the universality of Christianity, or shake the foundations upon which our religious life and our Christian theology rest? Without doubt we are through with the processes of a popular apologetics which is mistaken as to the means at its disposal, and which, in the most favorable hypothesis, could appear plausible only to those spirits already convinced; doubtless also we are through with the fiction which has been called "natural religion," and which is nothing other than the "*caput mortuum* of the ancient philosophical tradition today exhausted"<sup>2</sup> or a pale abstraction drawn from the positive and historical religions; but if we are resolved to shake off the yoke of old and useless systems, it is only because we mean to free ourselves for the task which the Gospel imposes upon us. The Christian faith would abdicate if it should neglect to be missionary and conquering, but it must know in

<sup>1</sup>Ph. Bridel.

<sup>2</sup>Sabatier.

what manner it can establish the religious certitude and cause others to attain it. That is the only way of establishing an apologetics worthy of the name.

The original defect of popular apologetics is also the error committed by the leaders of the exact and natural sciences. In both cases one lives in the illusion that the supreme, if not unique, form of certitude is that which is acquired by a theoretical knowledge, by objective research which aspires to reach the *nexus rerum* and the laws of being. One imagines that to assure the scientific character, and, therefore, universality and authority, of the Christian truth, it is indispensable that it shall be justified at the bar of theoretical reason. Now, natural and mechanical philosophy declares this undertaking to be impossible, and, seeing no other way of justifying the pretensions of Christianity, it labels it "illusionism," and passes on to some other question. The apologists, dominated by the intellectualism to which their adversaries bow, have recourse to the arguments furnished by philosophy or by natural theology, and try to give to religious truth a theoretical foundation. They concede willingly that the Christian faith carries us into the domain of realities perceived by the conscience, but these realities do not seem to them guaranteed and unassailable only when they

have assured their solidity by establishing them upon the foundation of the so-called primordial, universal truths accessible to the faculties of the natural man. Hence the apologists attempt to establish first that which they call the necessary presupposition of the Gospel; and, their sub-structure being well founded, they merrily proceed to build the edifice of their Christian system.

Very different is the procedure of the theologians who, following the principles of Luther, of Schleiermacher, and of Vinet, or rather inspired by the word and the spirit of Christ and his apostles, establish the character *sui generis* of religious certitude, the practical and personal function of the subject, the inner and spontaneous determination of the life of the being who knows, a moral act which implies a state of the soul produced by the object of the knowledge. A certitude thus acquired could not be increased by the intellectual operations which have no hold upon the order to which the realities attained and possessed by this consciousness belong. What shall I say? These intellectual operations compromise and warp faith and transport it into a sphere which it does not belong to and in which it perishes.

Is it necessary to give some examples of the difference between these two points of view and methods?

Traditional theology attempts to determine first the idea of God conceived as the absolute personality, and to prove the existence of the supreme Being by help of a series of arguments whose weakness it sometimes feels and admits, but to which it attributes a pedagogic value, preparing and predisposing spirits to accept the testimony of supernatural revelation. From the general knowledge of God the religious subject is invited to raise himself to the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, the only saving knowledge, produced by the supreme and ultimate revelation. Each attribute, each work of God, is susceptible of being known and formulated—in an approximate manner, to be sure, but precise and exact in their general extent. The notion of the personality of God involves a positive definition of the intra-divine life, and affirms a transcendental truth as to the mode of existence of the Absolute Being. The attributes of the eternity or the omnipotence of God are doubtless only faint stammerings concerning his entire perfections, but they imply an objective revelation as to the relationship of God to space and time. Likewise, the doctrine of creation, according to which beings have been derived from nothingness by a free act of the sovereign Will, is an attempt to determine the method of the origin of the world. The doctrine of Providence com-

prises in like manner a series of problems the solution of which the theologian is expected to seek out. What is the relation between the first cause and secondary causes? Is God the *causa efficiens* or the *causa deficiens* of evil? How can the free will of a personal God be reconciled with the orderly play of the forces and laws of nature? The doctrine of sin, christology, the doctrine of redemption, have raised a cloud of similar questions which the dogmatician who respects himself is obliged to answer. Each of these answers, to be admitted, must be substantiated by its intrinsic, objective value, independent of the inner disposition of the subject; each of these answers must seek to indicate and characterize the objective and immanent realities of the phenomena or persons whose essence and relations theology tries, as far as possible, to penetrate and define. To be sure, the truths acquired by the labor of the dogmatician do not remain in a state of cold and bare doctrines in the soul of the believer; they take life, they gain a force and a fervor which they could not have in pure knowledge; they are transformed into rules of conduct, into determinations of the will, into subjective experiences; but, originally, they existed under the form of natural or supernatural revelations, which it has been necessary first to recognize in order to prove later. Such is the

course pursued by traditional dogmatics, which inspires and dominates in its turn popular apologetics; such is the invariable procedure of the ancient doctors who exhausted themselves in painful and laborious attempts to ascend to inaccessible summits. Every time they reached a new slope they saw the rock that they had rolled to the top by a thousand efforts escape from their bruised arms, and they exclaimed with indomitable courage: "Suppose we try again!"

As for us, we dare to believe that we ought not to try again. Not that we renounce in a cowardly manner the research after truth or that we declare that dogmatics pursues an illusory and sterile task, but we persist in thinking that the task of evangelical dogmatics is elsewhere, and that, by insisting on making moral and religious truths the material of a *theoretical* inquiry, Protestant theology belies its nature, renounces its mission, and compromises its dignity and its honor.

We believe, in a word, that religious certitude, which plunges its roots down to the depths of consciousness, is of another order than that of theoretical and objective certitude; it is not less than that, it is different; the difference between the two is not one of degree, but of kind. The Christian certainty is faith produced in the soul

by the experience of a supreme and divine reality whose existence we need not first establish and later test the effects, since it reveals itself immediately to our consciousness by its salutary and benign power. That reality, victorious over the world and over ourselves, is Jesus Christ, the unique and unshakable foundation established by eternal love in the center of history and in the heart of our life, the foundation upon which our trust and our hope, our strength and our joy, forever rest. Does implacable nature threaten to engulf us in a bottomless pit? Would the still more tragic and most formidable power of sin crush us beneath the weight of remorse and shame? We raise our eyes to Christ, the inviolable token of a love stronger than death and evil, and by that look of faith we perceive the Sun which bears healing and life in its rays. Thus, because Christ is for me a source of life, he is also a center of light. Religious knowledge of Jesus Christ, I mean to say the personal experience of his love and his holiness, gives me religious knowledge of God, of myself, and of the world. This knowledge is at once a gift of the grace of God and a task imposed upon the effort of the Christian; it is the supreme end of our moral and religious life, into which the Christ must enter, grow, and rule.

There resides the decisive justification of the

christocentric method in theology, for the spirit and the life of the Christian and the content of his faith are thus the object of evangelical and Protestant dogmatics. To make comprehensible in what consist the true and immovable foundation of Christian certitude; to describe the inner nature, the distinctive characters, and the divinely traced lines of this inner and experimental certitude; to develop and formulate scientifically that which is involved in and presupposed by this experience, which is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)—that is our task. In truth, it is serious enough, rich enough, beautiful enough to cause us to renounce without regret the tricks of theoretical reason and the reveries of mystical and speculative fantasy. It is also strong enough and likewise sure enough to establish a scrupulous and decisive apologetics and not to be disconcerted by the everlasting reproaches of inconsistency, dualism, and even duplicity, which its adversaries on all sides direct against it.

It is necessary that the apologetics whose direction and general inspiration we have just indicated above should seek its center of gravity where dogmatics finds its own, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. To proclaim, to show to souls the living and true Christ, the Christ of the gospels, either to satisfy the need of salvation or to awaken it in consciences open to impressions

from the moral world—such is the chief task of apologetics, whose work, offensive and defensive, is invariably dominated by the sovereign principle, Jesus Christ placed in the presence of the human spirit.

If, finally, we are accused of cutting the human being in two, of proclaiming the eternal divorce between theoretical reason and practical reason, of establishing an irreducible opposition between the God of nature and the God of our consciousness, we reply that we believe with all the power of our soul in the higher synthesis of these two worlds; but if we believe it, it is precisely by virtue of an act of faith acquired in the school of God in Jesus Christ. We bow with gratitude before every indication which announces or anticipates the mysterious and unalterable relationship which exists between the order of the first creation and the sphere of the *καὶ νῆ κτίσις*<sup>1</sup> revealed in Jesus Christ; we rejoice in the prophetic gleams from below which tend to explain the antinomies reigning in the feeling, thinking, willing being; but we remember that we are called to walk by faith, without sight, and against sight. It is precisely because we wish to believe without seeing that in the name of our God we carry on our researches in the world of moral and religious consciousness and that we demand of

<sup>1</sup>New Creation.

the naturalist or the historian that he shall not injure himself by any conscious self-deception. Henceforth, we rise by faith above the dualism with which they struggle who ignore the Gospel; in the light of the history of the Crucified, who has become the Lord of glory, we affirm that nature ends in spirit and that the supreme aim of spirit is the Kingdom of our Father who is in Heaven.

The reader who has had the patience to follow us will be convinced, I trust, that Protestant dogmatics, an introduction to which we have sketched, proposes for itself a work essentially positive, obedient to the imperishable teachings of the Gospel, faithful to the original inspiration and the religious principle of the Reformation, conforming to the needs and interests of the church which hopes to speak a language intelligible to the present generation.

I have traced a program only; I believe it is practicable; it is already on the way to progressive realization. Shall it be given me to have some part in it? I know not; that will depend upon the strength God may vouchsafe to me, and the welcome accorded to this Introduction.























UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 027 016 5

